

Ranny

Howard Brubaker

1917

Wishing you a Merry Christmas
"Jack."

From Mrs. F. E. Seiler



"ADMIT ONE—' AN ILLUSTRATED LECTURE UPON THE EVILS
OF INTEMPERANCE'"

Ranny

otherwise

Randolph Harrington Dukes

*A tale of those activities
which made him an important
figure in his town, in his
family—and in other families*

by

HOWARD BRUBAKER

with illustrations by

F. STROTHMANN



*HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON*

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Approved by NIND
 10/19/93 10:00 AM

RANNY

Copyright, 1917, by Harper & Brothers
Printed in the United States of America
Published July, 1917

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I

RANNY DISCOVERS AMERICA

ON a Thursday afternoon late in May the United States Government, which had hovered vaguely over Ranny's horizon for eight-going-on-nine years, came down and began to dabble in his personal affairs. This was amazing conduct on the part of a Government which was something like a flag and the Fourth of July and which the teacher talked about on Washington's Birthday. Strangest of all, this majestic Government revealed itself through the trifling person of Bud Hicks, a contemporary of Ranny's, who lived right there in Lakeville and who was a notoriously poor speller.

Ranny and Bud were coming home from school together, but because the grass was so warm and green and inviting they were not making rapid progress,

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Bud, in the act of inverting himself and standing on his hands, dropped some valuables out of his coat pocket—a piece of shoemaker's wax, two moss agates—and a letter. Before Bud could get back into the position intended by nature, Ranny had seized upon the letter. It was duly stamped, canceled, and postmarked, and was addressed, miraculously, to Mr. Raymond Hicks, "Raymond" being the stylish name by which Bud was known to his mother and teacher.

"Gimme my letter," Bud commanded, as he gathered up his other treasures.

"Where'd you get it?" asked Ranny, complying.

"In the post-office."

"Yes, you did," Ranny said, respectfully.

"I bet you a million dollars!" exclaimed Bud, adding, without waiting for his offer to be accepted: "I answered a ad. in a magazine. If you git five 'scriptions you git a air-gun." In proof of his statement Bud displayed a life-like portrait of the weapon. "Le's go an' see if they is any more mail."

Ranny, deeply impressed, assented. He had often gone to the post-office on pleasant Sunday mornings with Father, but he had never before thought of the institution as having any direct interest to boys.

"Who owns the post-office?" he asked, as they started away.

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"Nobody don't own it, you crazy," Bud replied; scornfully. "It belongs to the Gov'ment."

"You mean the Gover'ment," said Ranny, glad to find a rift in Bud's armor. Just the same, he felt a respect for Bud Hicks which he would never before have believed possible. Bud, though still of tender years, had a letter from the Government's post-office; it had his name on it and a stamp with George Washington's picture. It seemed to Ranny that in some mysterious way this short, curly-haired boy had joined the United States, while he, Randolph Harrington Dukes, was still, as the teacher had said on the day he spelled the great President's name "Lincon," a kind of foreigner.

There was no mail for either of them at the post-office, and the man in the window winked annoyingly over their heads at an adult who stood behind them; but one very important thing happened. In the post-office they met Tom Rucker, who displayed a letter alleged to be from a cousin in Manchester. So it seemed that Tom, also, was on speaking terms with the Government. Ranny began to wonder how far this thing had gone.

"Does ever'body get letters in the post-office?" he asked, as he and his companion were setting out for home.

"Sure they do," Bud replied. "Except Chiny-men; they can't read." This last remark was sug-

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gested by the sight of the Chinese laundry which they were passing.

“Chinymen eats rats,” said Ranny, and by a mutual impulse they slipped around to the side window of the laundry and peeked in, as they had often done before, half hoping, half fearing that they might find the Chinaman preparing his favorite dish. When the laundryman caught sight of them they ran very fast, because it is a well-known fact that Chinamen cut off boys’ ears.

But though post-offices, governments, and Chinamen were for the time forgotten in the joy of stealing a ride on the back of Alleston’s delivery-wagon and the rapture of being chased off, these matters weighed heavily on Ranny’s mind when he reached home. He had an impulse to ask Mother a few questions, but she seemed to be too busy with the baby and the supper to give out information upon affairs of state. By six-o’clock-whistle time, when, with face and hands washed and hair pasted down, he sat on the front porch waiting for Father to come home from the factory, he had firmly resolved that by some means he must have a letter from the post-office and get in touch with the Government. He would speak to Father without delay. Father knew all about the Government; he himself had heard Father tell Mr. Jennings that the Government had fallen into the hands of the interests.

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So absorbed was Ranny with his new idea that before he knew it, Father, pretending not to know it was the right house, had walked past the gate and had to be scampered after and brought back. As Ranny held fast to Father's hard, knotty hand and tried to match his long-legged strides, he realized that the present was no time for questions, because when Mother with a white apron on is in the doorway waiting to be kissed, Father's conversation is apt to be sketchy and unsatisfactory.

Not until supper was over, and Father in his rocking-chair on the front porch had begun to hold the evening paper close to his eyes in the thickening dusk, did Ranny feel that the time was ripe to put his new idea into words. He was seated on the floor by the step where he could reach over at any time and pull Father's trousers leg for dramatic emphasis.

"Bud Hicks got a letter," he said by way of opening the conversation with a bang.

Father grunted in that annoying way adults have of answering without paying attention.

"It's about a air-gun," Ranny continued.

That weapon brought Father's paper down at once.

"No air-guns, Ranny," he said; "they're dangerous. I'll make you a gun out of a broomstick." Thereupon he closed the interview by raising the paper again.

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Ranny, seeing that the conversation had gone astray, made a desperate effort to recover it.

"Father," he said, with a tug at the "emphasizer,"
"I wish I—"

"Randolph!"

Father seldom resorted to the stern form of the name, and now that he did, Ranny stood unjustly convicted of the high crime of teasing. Apparently this was one of those problems that had to be worked out without the aid of parents.

Remembering Bud's route to citizenship, Ranny went into the sitting-room to see if there was some magazine that would be of help. But the only periodical which the Dukes home contained, upon examination, was *The Wagon Maker*, a publication which Father seemed to find interesting, but which offered no aid in the present crisis. True, it contained an advertisement of real estate near Long Island Sound, but a haziness upon the meaning of real estate made it seem best not to "write for particulars." Better abandon the magazine idea entirely, he thought, than to run the risk of landing himself, and perhaps Father and Mother and the baby, in prison.

In the quiet darkness of his room that night, Ranny tossed to and fro on an uneasy bed, wide-eyed, gazing on the goal of his desire. He could think of no cousins in Manchester or elsewhere who would send

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letters to him; it would be years before the baby would be of letter-writing age. Sleep put an end to these reflections, but day streaming through his window brought an inspiration. At the noon hour he hastened to Bud Hicks for co-operation.

"I tell you what le's do," he said. "You write a letter to me an' I'll write a letter to you. We'll mail 'em in the post-office."

"I 'ain't got no money," Bud replied.

"I could get four cents easy," Ranny said, boastfully.

However, Bud, clinging to his monopoly, refused to have a part in any such plan.

"They wouldn't be reg'lar letters," he said, fondling his own grimy and desirable envelope.

"Aw," said Ranny, "you think you're smart with your dirty old letter." The interview degenerated into an exchange of sticks and small stones as they went their separate ways.

In his search for another correspondent that afternoon Ranny met with nothing but discouragement and ridicule. "Fatty" Hartman, who sat across the aisle, was not interested in his Government at all.

"You could tell it to me," he said, inanely, in reply to the proposal. "Why should you write me a letter?"

At recess-time "Fatty" told the joke to Bud

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Hicks, who repeated it to most of the other boys in the class amid widespread snickering.

"He's only trying to copy after me," said Bud, displaying his own poor apology for a letter.

Tom Rucker, whose humor always took a practical turn, increased the general hilarity by pouring water down Ranny's neck. After school there were further persecutions. Bud, suddenly remembering the conversation of the previous day, advanced the theory that Ranny was a Chinaman. The other boys adopted it gleefully, and the crowd that was gathered about a marble game in the open space back of the brick church greeted him as "pig-tail." As Ranny slipped away, he heard one boy call out, "He's goin' home to eat rats."

That night after supper Ranny sat on the front step in deep despondency. He seemed farther from his patriotic goal than ever; there was not a boy in the class who would write him a letter now. Mother came out of the house and with a sigh of relief sank to the step by his side and laid a tired hand upon his own. Putting away the paper and lighting a cigar, Father became human and jovial. An electric light on the corner came to life with a hiss, and Mother pointed out how beautifully it glowed through the green of the new leaves. A young girl chattered somewhere in the shadows, just as girls do on the way home from school.

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Suddenly a desperate thought came to Ranny—why not exchange letters with a girl? Of course he would not dare to show the contents of the envelope to anybody, but surely it would be better to have a letter from a girl than never to get into Government circles at all.

The next day he took the matter up with Josie Kendal, who sat in front of him. Except when he pulled her hair, Josie always listened to him and laughed at his jokes. Josie's writing was queer and she probably cared nothing about the Government, but the time for being particular had passed.

"Say, Josie," he whispered, "if I write you a letter, will you write me a letter?"

Josie giggled, but did not commit herself.

"I mean reg'lar letters in the post-office," Ranny went on, "with stamps an' ever'thing."

Josie turned around and looked at him with serious inquiry in her blue eyes. "What should I write to you, Ranny?" she asked.

"Josie, turn around, please!" Miss Mills said, sharply, to the great amusement of "Fatty" Hartman.

"I'll write you a letter," Ranny whispered, when conversation seemed safe once more, "and you can answer it."

Josie bobbed her pigtails in assent.

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Ranny hurried home that afternoon so fast that when he arrived there Mother said, "My gracious!" and looked at the clock.

"Mother," said Ranny, "I wish you'd give me two cents."

"What do you want it for?" Mother asked.

"Oh, sumpin'," he replied, fumbling with a button on his coat.

After searching through some coins in a baking-powder can, Mother produced the required amount. Putting the pennies in his pocket, Ranny went to the writing-desk in the sitting-room and got an envelope, a tablet, and a pencil. At last he stood face to face with the problem that had been giving him trouble all day. What should he write to Josie? None of the usual remarks about "Fatty" Hartman's fatness or the teacher's crossness or Josie's pigtails and freckles seemed suited to the demands of that great mysterious Government. But as he stood reflectively chewing his pencil, suddenly the whole difficulty was cleared away. On a shelf in the combination bookcase-desk, between *The Story of Man* and *The Treasury of Golden Thoughts*, was a volume that showed you how to do everything properly. In this hitherto useless book were letters already written out; Ranny had only to copy one, sign his name to it, and mail it to Josie. To avoid questions he withdrew with his task to the "secret

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den," which parents and other ill-informed adults spoke of as the woodshed.

This structure, which adjoined the kitchen, did, as a matter of fact, contain wood, also a tool-bench, a discarded bedstead, and the remains of a clock. In one corner there was a small inclosure constructed of boxes by father's help and devoted to Ranny's own purposes. Sometimes it was a robber's cave, sometimes a drug-store, and it was always a picture-gallery for color work of a humorous nature. To-day it looked like one of those advertisements which invite you to "study drawing at home"; for Ranny had hit upon a fine device. One letter in the book was printed in script, and he was tracing it with a lead-pencil over a carbon paper that had come with his Christmas drawing-set. The result revealed Ranny as a flawless penman and an inveterate letter-writer—except for the signature and the address on the envelope. He would try to get down to the post-office and mail the letter at noon the next day; for the evening he had nothing to do except to reach into his pocket from time to time to see that the letter was safe.

The next forenoon, just by way of assuring Josie that everything was going along without a hitch, he poked her respectfully in the back and gave her a glimpse of the envelope, concealed from the public gaze by the covers of his geog-

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raphy. Josie giggled gratifyingly and put back her hand.

"Let me look at it," she whispered.

Ranny started to comply, keeping his eye on the teacher, but at this moment Bud Hicks, who was evidently watching the proceedings, gave an appreciative cough. The teacher's eye swept over the room. Josie, alarmed, withdrew her hand, and the letter fell into the aisle. Ranny dropped back into the position of one deeply concerned about the Orinoco River, but the teacher was beside his desk in an instant, asking him to pick up the letter.

"Did you write that, Randolph?" Miss Mills asked, noting the address.

"Yes, ma'am," he replied, with a sinking heart.

"Did you write to him first, Josie?"

Josie's braids bobbed emphatic denial, and she looked at Ranny as though she had never before noticed that he sat behind her.

Ranny had a fleeting fear that Miss Mills was going to open the letter; a moment later he was sorry she had not. It is doubtful if anybody but a teacher could have thought of the scheme that she immediately unfolded.

"Miss Kendal," she said, with an ironical bow, "this is your letter. Please open it and copy it in full on the blackboard. The gentleman who thinks

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this is a post-office will kindly stay after school and learn better."

Ranny heard a muffled snicker back of him somewhere and felt his ears growing hot. He had a sensation as of eyes sticking into him from all directions, and he knew that to meet "Fatty" Hartman's gaze would be disastrous. He wished he was out in the open air; he wished he had a drink of water.

Finally Josie finished her task and was allowed to take her seat. Ranny had a new sinking of the heart when he realized how his work had suffered from Josie's ruinous scrawl. Miss Mills, who had been busy suppressing outbreaks of lawlessness, now read the message over, wrinkling up her brows in perplexity. The letter was as follows:

DEAR SIR,—Your esteemed favor of the seventh inst. at hand, and in reply will state that we have this day forwarded to your address the following mdse., for which we hand you invoices herewith, subject to 5 per cent. 10 days or 4 per cent. 30 days.

9 bbls. flour No. 7B

18 cwt. lime

1 hgd. Orleans molasses

100 lbs. leaf lard.

Thanking you for your valued order and anticipating a continuance of your patronage, we beg to remain,

Yours very respectfully,

RANDOLPH HARRINGTON DUKES.

Upon reading this letter Miss Mills was seized with a violent fit of coughing and had to take refuge in a handkerchief and a glass of water. To Ranny this

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was a welcome reprieve, as though he had arrived at the dentist's and found him occupied with another patient.

"You may give me that letter, Josie," she said at last. "The children will please remember that this is not the place"—another cough—"for business transactions. The class in geography!"

That ordeal over, Ranny began to hope that the interview at noon might also pass without physical violence. At any rate, he thought, as the other pupils filed out with grins in his direction, he would escape the scoffing public opinion in the street below.

Miss Mills's first question as she leaned against "Fatty" Hartman's desk and looked down upon Ranny with searching, puzzled eyes was reassuring.

"Where did you write this letter, Ranny?"

"At home."

"But this isn't your handwriting," she exclaimed, as she looked at the contents of the envelope for the first time.

Ranny enlightened her as to the carbon-paper device.

"And you brought it to school to give it to Josie?"

"I was going to take it to the post-office," he explained, laboriously producing two cents as proof. Even now, in one of life's crises, he found himself wondering whether it wouldn't be well to spend the money for all-day suckers.

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"Ranny," said the teacher, "you are telling me the truth I know; but why did you want to write to Josie? Is she—"

Ranny recognized the silly adult idea from afar and forestalled it.

"I want to get a letter from the post-office and Josie said she would answer," he said, earnestly. "I want to belong to the Gover'nment like Washington an' Lincoln. I never get any letters. You said I was a foreigner an' the boys call me Chinyman an' ever'thing."

The teacher seemed at last to understand. She dismissed him with the confusing impression that he had not done anything wrong, but that he mustn't do it again. Just as he was leaving the room he looked back, and there was Miss Mills at her desk, her face very serious as she gazed thoughtfully at the window.

This scene was but the foretaste of a long, hard, painful afternoon. "Fatty" Hartman, whenever the teacher's back was turned, made violent motions as of one writing letters. Once Bud Hicks succeeded in catching his eye with a libelous caricature on his slate, labeled, "Ranny and Josie." That young person was scornful; to a friendly tug on her hair she responded by elevating her stubby nose and pulling her braids over her shoulder to safety, informing a gleeful world that her latch-string was no longer out to Randolph Harrington Dukes. The long

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school day expired in gloom. He had tried everything and failed. He might have been a Spaniard, for all the good the United States was to him.

Leaving the other boys at the school-yard gate, Ranny set off for home through Carrington's alley. But his tormentors were not to be evaded so easily.

"Hey, Ranny, there goes your girl!" he heard Bud call out. Bud, followed by a number of trouble-seekers, caught up with Ranny at the intersection of the two alleys. Clenching his fists, Ranny turned and faced his enemy.

"Aw, let me alone!" he said. "What's the matter with you?"

Bud, encouraged by the shouts of the boys behind him, ignored the threatening attitude and crowded up close.

"Pigtail Chinyman," he said, tauntingly.

Nobody was more surprised at what followed than Ranny himself; his fist flew out and landed solidly on Bud's chin. As if encouraged by its partner's success, the other fist traveled straight to Bud's stomach. In the next instant Ranny found himself lying flat upon his prostrate enemy.

"Pull 'im off, kids," Bud gasped, but nobody moved; Bud's side of the controversy seemed suddenly to have grown unpopular.

"One fella at a time," said "Fatty" Hartman.

Ranny pressed one hand, not gently, over Bud's

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face and with the other succeeded in reaching the letter in Bud's pocket. Thereupon, still sitting securely upon Bud's wriggling form, he stowed the letter away in his own pocket.

"Whose a Chinyman now?" Ranny asked.

"Let me up," Bud sputtered, in a tone of surrender.

Ranny released his beaten foe, took the cap that Tom Rucker handed him, and let "Fatty" Hartman brush some dust off his knee. Nobody called him names now.

"It's all right for you!" Bud said, as he started off alone. All the other boys laughed.

But when the excitement was over and Ranny sat alone in the "secret den" his depression returned. He had disposed of Bud Hicks and stopped the jeering, but he was just as far from being a good American as ever. The "secret den" presently changed to a drug-store, wobbled awhile between a robber's cave and a picture-gallery, and ended—sure sign of a disordered universe—as a plain woodshed.

The six-o'clock whistle was a welcome sound that evening, and when the paternal cap appeared, bobbing up and down along Webber's picket fence, Ranny was down the path like an arrow. But Father, curiously, did not boost him to his shoulder or pull the too-big cap down over Ranny's ears. Instead, he acted strangely, stopping and gazing

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thoughtfully at the house, more like a tall, thin book-agent than a father.

"Young man," he said, "perhaps you can tell me where I can find a person by the name of"—here he consulted an envelope that he had drawn from his pocket—"Randolph Harrington Dukes?"

With a wild half-hope Ranny flashed an inquiry up at Father's face and pounced upon the envelope. It came upon him in a burst of glory—stamp, post-mark, and, in a handwriting that was faintly familiar, strange and wonderful in their new dignity, the words, "Randolph Harrington Dukes, City."

Clasping the letter tightly, he went dancing and skipping up the path to bring Mother the joyful news. She came out of the house wiping her hands on her apron so that she might examine the letter. Instead of getting ready for supper, Father sat down and looked expectant. It was the general opinion that the letter should be opened, so Ranny intrusted it to Father, who read in his best "company" tone:

"DEAR RANNY,—When vacation begins next Thursday I shall be packing my trunk to go away. I want you, if you can, to come to my boarding-house in the morning and run some errands for me. Then maybe you will help about my plan. I am looking for a bright American boy about eight years old who writes a good hand and knows about Washington and Lincoln to exchange letters with me this summer. I have lots of stamps. Maybe you would like to do it. I am going first to Washington, where the Government, is and I will write you a letter from there.

Your Friend,"

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Here Father pretended that he could not make out the signature and asked for the loan of Mother's eyes. Ranny had to bombard Father's knee to get the letter. It was signed by—"Edith Mills."

Randolph Harrington Dukes, City, sat on the gatepost after supper, dangling bare white legs and ruling over a smiling June universe. Foremost in his thoughts was the United States Government, fathered by Washington, saved by Lincoln, and now fallen into the hands of the interests. He would have to ask Father about the interests one of these days; in fact, there were many things he would have to learn about the Government—now.

"I'll give Bud back his letter to-morrow," he said to himself, "an' show him mine."

The level rays of the setting sun touched the new green leaves with flame, splashed liquid gold upon the bowed bare head of the wondering little boy. His eyes rested proudly upon the breast pocket of his faded blue jacket; there it gleamed where all the passing world might see, his badge of citizenship, a white envelope and a red stamp.

"Red, white, an' blue," said Ranny, with a patriotic thrill at the discovery. "It's sumpin' like the Fourth of July."

II

THE POWER OF THE PRESS

SCHOOL had closed and the teacher had started off upon her summer of letter-writing and travel. Ranny sat on the front porch, the evening paper on his knees, and, as one in the grasp of a new idea, meditatively rubbed a grimy toe against a brown, mosquito-bitten ankle.

“Nobody never told me,” he thought, “that a little, small fella could have his name printed in the paper.”

Ranny was dimly aware that Mother had called out from the house requesting a pitcher of water for supper, also that it was high time that he was at the front gate ready to tow Father through the perilous shoals. But these duties were put over into unfinished business—in the puzzling world of eight-going-on-nine it is safest to stick to one thing until it is settled. So Ranny raised the paper and, this time with comparative ease, read over the amazing item:

Clarence Raleigh, son of Mr. and Mrs. William F. Raleigh, entertained seven of his playmates yesterday afternoon at his

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home on North Elm Street, it being the occasion of his eighth birthday. Delicious refreshments were served. The little fellows report a very enjoyable time.

This chance discovery, the result of idly glancing at the *Evening Bulletin* while waiting for Father to come home, set Ranny's ideas topsy-turvy. Clarence Raleigh had never seemed to him a very important boy; he was a poor "wrestler," and the teacher's pet, and he wore shoes in the summer-time. Now, suddenly, he had leaped into fame. The next time Ranny went along Elm Street maybe Clarence would be sitting out in front and would say, "Hello, Ranny!" and he would answer, "Hello!" and Clarence would say, "Did you see my name in the paper?" Clarence would put on airs as if he had broken his leg like Tinny Malone or got a job sweeping out the First National Bank like Arthur Wilson.

If it is true that the life of the growing child reproduces the history of the race, Ranny arrived on that late afternoon in June at the age of publicity.

Father came into port under his own steam and promptly joined in inviting his son to get water. As a matter of form Ranny sat down with his parents at supper, but he had no interest in commonplace proceedings; in fact, he was so preoccupied that he declined a second helping of bread and jelly.

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"What's the matter, Ranny?" asked Father.
"Are you sick?"

"Clarence Raleigh had a party," the boy replied.
"His name's in the paper."

"Did you eat too much cake?"

"Tom!" exclaimed Mother, reproachfully, and Father put his hand over his mouth. Mother, being a woman, made a different kind of mistake entirely.

"Don't mind, dear," she said. "We don't get invited to Mrs. Raleigh's parties, either."

"His name's in the paper," Ranny declared, earnestly. "I read it."

"They should never have taught this boy to read," said Father, with a tremendous wink; "he'll be wanting to go to everything now."

Ranny saw that he must work out this newspaper problem alone. Now that the *Evening Bulletin* had ceased to confine itself to the footless affairs of grown-ups, he would have to give it a share of his attention; he had never before thought it of any value except for making kites. He would have begun his researches at once, only Father, according to his custom, read the paper on the front porch until the light failed.

But the next morning, as soon as he had fed his guinea-pigs, Ranny adjourned to the "secret den" and studied the public prints.

There was, of course, much in the *Evening Bulletin*

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that was utter waste of paper—vague, useless things about politics and war and courts and business, puzzling big words and untalkable English. The personal column, on the other hand, was human and interesting; it suggested so many ways of getting one's name into print. Clarence, of course, had adopted an excellent method, with his seven little playmates and his delicious refreshments. Ranny cut out this item and pinned it on the wall. Mr. and Mrs. Wheelock had done almost as well by becoming the parents of an infant daughter. W. H. Adams had indulged in the doubtful pleasure of a fire that was prevented from becoming serious only by the prompt use of a bucket of water. Mrs. James Barton had got into print by being seriously ill. There were a number of toothsome items about the fine things to eat that were for sale at Alleston's grocery. Also the paper frequently remarked that Webber was a reliable druggist; this was interesting because Mr. Webber lived only two doors from Ranny's house and had a dog that barked but didn't bite.

The royal road to publicity, however, was undoubtedly the C. M. and W. No other device was so common or so delightful as going somewhere on the train, or coming back. Note a few examples in this one issue: Mrs. George Frazer and little son were visiting friends in Marion; James H. Hight

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had left for Cincinnati on business; Mrs. Something-or-other that was hard to pronounce was visiting her daughter, Mrs. H. K. Jones—easy notoriety for Mrs. Jones!

“If I wanted to get *my* name in the paper,” said Ranny, who could always talk to himself safely in the “secret den,” “I’d go somewheres on the train.”

This thought suggested a diversion he seldom permitted himself, because it was unpopular with Mother. Securing his wide straw hat unostentatiously from behind the kitchen door and leaving by the alley gate, he set out for the railway station, resolved to see what fellow-townsmen were laying up treasures for themselves in the evening paper. The court-house clock striking eleven assured him that he would be in plenty of time for the 11.23, which males of all ages spoke of as Number Nine. At the depot Ranny found the platform already crowded and he had to guard his bare feet as he picked his way among the heels of preoccupied adults. Several persons of tender and interesting ages were there, dressed in going-away clothes and gripped by their wrists on the common parental theory that children are always bent on suicide. Ranny wondered whether these young people would get into the paper under their own names or only as anonymous sons and daughters.

As the board platform was uncomfortably hot to

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the feet, Ranny crept into the rather ample shadow of a lady who seemed stationary. Presently a young man named Gifford Rawlins approached, tapping with a pencil upon a little pack of white cards.

"Going away, Mrs. Thompson?" Rawlins asked.

"Yes," the lady replied, and added, a little shamefacedly, "but I don't know as you need to put it in the paper." Before Ranny had time to be surprised at her perversity Mrs. Thompson had relented and was taking the public into her confidence, admitting that she was going to Auburn to visit her sister, Emmeline, whose married name was Mrs. Albert Randall, spelled with two "l's."

Ranny had seen Rawlins before and had been vaguely aware that he "worked in the printing-office"; but until now he had never realized what an important function Rawlins performed in the life of Lakeville. This slim young man with the flappy serge coat and the smudge of a mustache was the link between the citizen and the press; he wandered about from group to group, asking questions and jotting down answers.

Deeply impressed, Ranny deserted the shady Mrs. Thompson and followed Rawlins about, acquiring valuable information. Mr. Burgess, the lawyer, was going to Littleton on business; a traveling-man thought it unnecessary to say anything about himself

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(and his two valises) because he was going away so constantly. Mrs. Furguson was not taking a trip herself, but she was expecting a visit from a niece, and the *Bulletin* was treated to the fascinating details.

In his absorption Ranny crowded too close to the newspaper man; Rawlins turned and looked him all over, as if a small boy with a straw hat and sturdy brown legs were a strange sight in Lakeville.

"I suppose," said the representative of the press, "that you are going to New York to buy a few railroads."

Ranny, embarrassed, withdrew to a respectful distance and leaned against the baggage-wagon, only to receive a sharp rebuff from a man in black overalls who seemed to need the thing for his own purposes.

"Get away from that truck!" shouted the man. "It's bad enough, anyway."

What was bad enough he did not say, but Ranny gathered that he was annoyed because so many people were using his railroad.

Many times in the hours that followed Ranny reproached himself for not having made a better showing before the reporter. If he had managed things right perhaps the name Randolph Harrington Dukes—in full, just as it had appeared upon the teacher's letter—might have burst upon startled Lakeville that night, much to Clarence Raleigh's

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chagrin. But even after a day of thought he had been unable to recall anything important about himself except that he had three new guinea-pigs and a loose tooth; and apparently the *Bulletin* never printed items of that sort. In his task of reproducing the history of civilization, Ranny had leaped in twenty-four hours from the discovery of printing to the need of a press agent.

For four feverish days he neglected his ordinary pursuits and moved in newspaper circles. No Indians whooped in the back yard, no velocipede rattled over the bumpy place in Webber's cement sidewalk. He haunted the station at train times and in the evening enjoyed the keen literary pleasure of reading facts he already knew. He loitered in the grimy back yard of the printing-office, fascinated by the clatter of the press and the smell of the damp paper and the hacking cough of the gas-engine. Once a boy whom he knew, somewhat older than himself, but not old enough to scorn two caramels and a piece of sling-shot rubber, allowed him to go along in to get his papers and subsequently to help him on his route. In those days Ranny changed his very life ideals, lightly forsaking his youthful fancy for the career of a restaurant-keeper and resolving to grow up into a pressman with a distended cheek and with ink clear to his elbows. Ranny's devotion to letters would have delighted his teacher if she had

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known about it; but he began to come late to his meals in a way that did not delight Mother at all.

"I don't know what has come over him," Mother said, one night at supper; "he never stays at home any more or gets kindlings or helps with the baby."

"What are you up to, Ranny?" Father asked.

Ranny did not feel that his parents would understand the finer points of the case, so he answered, evasively:

"Oh, jest foolin' around an' havin' fun."

"You fool around a little closer home after this," Father replied.

This rather silent man did not often find it necessary to administer a rebuke to his son (possibly because during the greater part of every week-day he was engaged in the manufacture of wagons); but when he did speak sternly his words had the force of a Supreme Court decision. Ranny realized that night that his days of philandering with transportation and the public prints were over. The time had come for him to carry out the plan that had been gradually rolling up in his consciousness. It was a lawless plan, fraught with dim difficulties, but Ranny's mind (to quote high authority) was "a one-track road." The eight-going-on-nine world is bewildering enough in its essentials without being cluttered up with distracting details.

Accordingly, at a favorable opportunity the next

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morning he concealed his best clothes in the "secret den" and, after much angling with a stick and a piece of chewing-gum, abstracted a nickel and eleven pennies from his firecracker fund in the iron savings-bank. This was pleasant and easy work, but as he faced his next task his courage ran very low. It was a remarkably hot morning; the "secret den" was like an oven. As he looked at the waist he had to put on, the "boughten pants" that had been a little too tight even at the beginning, the suicidal shoes and stockings, he was strongly tempted to abandon dreams of glory, to go out and pump a little water on his head and sit in the grape-arbor. It was an ideal day for sitting.

But just when his resolution was at its lowest ebb his eye fell upon the item he had cut from the newspaper, the item that had brought fame to the insignificant Clarence. This bit of paper brought a new supply of courage, and after a painful time he emerged from the "secret den," sweaty, itchy, and triumphant, elegant against all the laws of nature, an unmistakable traveler from creaking black shoes to beribboned sailor hat. And leaving by way of the barn, he took the less-conspicuous route to the station.

On the way he met Bud Hicks, a person of low intelligence who seemed to think there was something humorous in being dressed up on a week-day.

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"Hey! get on to that, would you?" said Bud, addressing an imaginary third person. "Oh, gracious! ain't he sweet?" He added injury to these insults by tilting Ranny's sailor hat down over one eye.

"Aw, get outa my way!" Ranny exclaimed. "Can't you see I'm in a hurry?"

"Where you goin'?" asked Bud, just a shade respectfully.

"If you look in the paper to-night mebbe you'll find out." Although he was in such a hurry, Ranny found time to add, "I don't know if you can read the paper."

When he reached the station he had a sudden sinking of the heart. There was nobody on the platform, the ticket-window was closed, the building was apparently deserted. Had he, then, after all his suffering, missed Number Nine? A "snake feeder" came in the open door and on quivering wings investigated the merits of a red-and-blue invitation to a dollar Sunday excursion, decided adversely, and whizzed away. Ranny had bitter thoughts of Bud Hicks, who had detained him on the way; he looked at the hated shoes which had given him such trouble in the "secret den," and had an impulse to "scuff" them against something. But before he did anything revengeful two women walked into the station, the hotel 'bus drew up outside to a noisy "whoe," and presently the ticket-window went up with a

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bang. He had been too early and not too late for the train!

When the first demand for tickets had been satisfied, Ranny, taking a tight grip on his courage—and upon the coins in his pocket—approached the ticket-window. By standing on tiptoe and clinging to the counter he could just see the ceiling of the office.

“How much does it cost,” he asked, “to ride on the train?”

The telegraph instrument clicked a long time and the blood pounded in his ears; he was about to repeat his question when two arms, covered with funny black stockings, appeared in the window and the curious face of the station agent came out like a spectacled turtle.

“What’s your name, bub?” the man asked.

“Randolph Harrington Dukes.”

“Oh, you’re Tom Dukes’s boy, are you? Where do you want to go?”

“Manchester.”

“Are you alone?”

“Yes”—faintly.

The station man tapped doubtfully with his fingers upon the window counter.

“Well,” he said, finally, “you go half-fare. It’s fifteen cents one way and thirty cents round trip.”

The chubby fist on the edge of the counter opened

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and reluctantly gave up its store of sweaty coins; the man stamped and handed out a ticket, also one cent, which, obeying a subtle magnetic force, drew its owner toward the slot machine. With the ticket in one hand and a piece of chocolate in the other, Ranny set forth in search of publicity.

Out on the platform the reporter was wandering about, gathering food for a hungry reading public; his presence set at rest a fear which had haunted Ranny that Rawlins might get sick or fall into the printing-press just when he was most needed. Rallying his moral forces, he planted himself in front of the rising young journalist:

“I’m going to Manchester,” he said, introducing the chocolate as documentary evidence, then, in confusion, substituting the ticket.

Rawlins looked down at him as if surprised at the change in the boy’s appearance since they had last met. Ranny had an uneasy feeling that his bow tie was more lumpy than mothers usually made them and that his neck and ears might not be convincing—he had not gone to any absurd lengths in the matter of ablutions. But Rawlins, fortunately, was not captious.

“What’s your name?” he asked, flourishing his pencil with a wink at a bystander.

Ranny gave his name in its full dignified form.

“What are you going to do in Manchester?”

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"I-I'm going v-visiting." Ranny never stammered except when it was the worst thing he could do.

"Yes?" said Rawlins, encouragingly.

"I-I'm g-goin' to visit my a-aunt."

"And what is your aunt's name?"

"S-s-smith," said Ranny, desperately.

To his great relief, somebody called out, "Say, Giff, come 'ere a minute."

It was the station agent, who had stuck his head out of a window that opened upon the platform. This man's life-work seemed to be sticking his head out of windows; there were people in Lakeville older than Ranny who had never seen the lower half of the ticket agent.

The two men conversed in low tones and once Ranny fancied they were looking at him. Resisting a desire to eat his candy, he put one hand into the breast of his waist and walked about with long strides like a public character. The platform was quite crowded now; the baggage-man's face wore a hunted look and Ranny heard him ask the 'bus-driver, "What do they think I am?"

Number Nine was such a long time in coming that Ranny's eyeballs ached from gazing up the shimmering track; if the train did not come, what, he wondered, would be the attitude of the press toward those who had spoken of going on it? But at last

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the long, low whistle east of town put all doubts at rest. The goal of his ambition was in sight. Tonight people would be sitting on front porches all over Lakeville and saying to one another:

"Oh, I see by the paper that Randolph Harrington Dukes has gone to Manchester." Bud Hicks would hear about it and be unpleasantly surprised; Mother would be greatly pleased at the honor that had befallen the family, and Father would probably talk it over with Mr. Jennings. More than likely there would be ice-cream soda for all hands.

These happy reflections were put to a sudden end, for, as the train arrived in a gale of cinders, a heavy hand descended upon Ranny's shoulder. He cried out more with surprise than pain, and, twisting about looked up in the face of Rawlins.

"You stay with me, kid," said the reporter, with an eloquent squeeze of the shoulder. "Your father says you can't go."

"Is Father here?" Ranny asked, in dismay.

"Telephone," said Rawlins.

Ranny understood. The reporter and the ticket agent had put their heads together and telephoned to Father at the factory office. The perpetual adult conspiracy against boyhood had done its hateful work.

Bitter disappointment swept over him; he swallowed desperately; he made an ill-advised attempt to kick the rising young journalist on the shin.

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"You better let go!" he said, menacingly, but Rawlins only gave him an unnecessary shake and the train creaked and puffed and pulled away.

"Now," said Rawlins, relaxing his hold, "*you will* try to run away, will you?"

Ranny looked up at the man who for four days had represented everything that was most desirable in life.

"Aw," he said in a choking voice, "who's tryin' to run away?" Thereupon, in the presence of a representative of the press and a number of Lakeville's citizens, Randolph Harrington Dukes cried.

A lady unknown to him removed his fists from his eyes and dabbed his face with a handkerchief, shaking her head with distress at the black smudge on the cloth. A small boy in a costume of two pieces plus a fragment of a straw hat shifted his weight from one bare foot to the other on the hot boards and grinned. Humiliation was complete.

Into this situation walked a tall, wide man who had evidently arrived on the train.

"What's this, what's this?" the new-comer asked. "Tom Dukes's boy? What's the matter, little feller?"

"He tried to run away," said the barefoot boy, traitorously joining the adult conspiracy.

Rawlins explained the matter in disgusting detail. The big man opened his eyes very wide and

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exclaimed, "Well, I'll be jiggered, and presently, 'I'll be switched."

"I'll take him home," he said to Rawlins; "his folks live over my way."

So Ranny, who had apparently ceased to be a free agent, was transferred from the custody of Rawlins to that of the "heavy-set man." At any rate, the change was an improvement. The man was so big around that he was a diverting spectacle; his eyebrows were drawn high upon his face as if he were permanently astonished.

"So you're Tom Dukes's boy, tryin' to run away?" At his own question he broke into a laugh that shook his whole body and set the peach-seed basket on his watch-chain to dancing joyously. He had to let go of his charge's hand and mop his face with a red handkerchief. Ranny did not know what the joke was, but it was a pleasure to see a man laugh so extensively.

"You ask your father, when you get home, if he remembers the time him and Jim Stoner went 'coon-huntin' over by Yella Crick."

Ranny decided that he liked this Mr. Stoner; he began to hope that his new friend would come right into the house and greet the family—Father would be at home for dinner by this time. In fact he went so far as to plan that, just as they entered the yard, he would call out, cheerfully, "Father,

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here's Mr. Stoner." Father and Mr. Stoner would then no doubt fall to talking about old times, and an affair which might so easily be otherwise would become rather a jovial occasion. Only he wished Mr. Stoner would settle upon "jiggered" and stop saying, "I'll be switched"; that sort of thing puts ideas into parents' heads.

As they went along Ranny gave polite attention to Mr. Stoner's remarks and laughed heartily whenever it seemed proper. In so doing he tried to divert attention from what was going on behind them. It was not necessary that Mr. Stoner should see that the boy from the station had been following them at a cautious distance, whistling on his fingers from time to time and inviting the interest of other youth. Ranny knew by the noise that the rising generation was gathering rapidly. There were guffaws and giggles, and once he distinctly heard the words of Ted Blake, who was never careful of his language: "No, he won't get a deuce of a whalin' or nuthin', oh no!" As they turned a corner Ranny permitted himself a careful glance across Mr. Stoner's periphery and discovered that Tom Rucker and "Fatty" Hartman, amid popular approval, were giving an impersonation of him and his new friend walking hand in hand. "Fatty" was leaning backward and waddling like a duck, thus making himself appear even more corpulent than he was by nature. Tom

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was blubbering ostentatiously. The incidental music was a kind of chant: "Ranny ran away, Ranny ran away." On the whole he was glad when the journey was at an end and he had slipped comfortably out of the frying-pan.

The home-coming was not at all as planned. Mother rushed down to the gate, threw her arms around him, and cried—a little. Mrs. Brown, the next-door neighbor, laid loving, but dishwatery, hands upon him and told him he was a bad boy. Father looked very grave and said, "Thank you, Jim." Mr. Stoner departed at once, still vacillating between being jiggered and switched. With his going the street and the yard—and the future—seemed very desolate to Randolph Harrington Dukes.

Ranny was not switched; neither was he jiggered, unless that means being put into a hot and untimely bed and told to spend the afternoon in remorse. Remorse proved an unpleasant and tiresome business, so Ranny went to sleep. When he awoke he was surprised to find that the yellow sunlight was flooding the room and that Father was standing beside the bed, poking him with a folded newspaper.

"Ranny," said Father, in a tone that had in it more of sadness than of anger, "why did you try to run away? Isn't your home good enough for you? Don't we give you everything you need?"

"I wasn't runnin' away," said Ranny.

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“Randolph!”

“I wasn’t,” said Ranny, earnestly. “I was jest goin’ to climb through the train an’ get out on the other side.”

“Look here, son,” said Father, sharply, “don’t make it worse by lying. You put on your best clothes and you bought a ticket for Manchester.”

The whole truth had to come out now in refutation of the unjust charge that he was trying to run away.

“I wanted ’em to print my name in the paper like Clarence Raleigh an’ Mrs. Thompson an’ Mr. Webber an’ Clarence Raleigh an’ ever’body.”

“You wanted them to say you were running away?”

“I wasn’t runnin’ away. I wanted them to print—you know—Randolph Harrington Dukes, son of Thomas Dukes, is v-visiting—”

“Listen,” Father interrupted, seating himself on the edge of the bed and unfolding the paper. “See how you like it:

“‘Stops boy runaway—representative of this paper captures young Randolph Dukes, who is about to take the train for Manchester.’”

Ranny was dizzy with embarrassment and chagrin and anger; only fragments of Father’s recital came to his consciousness—“a half-fare ticket for Manchester . . . voluntarily disclosed his purpose . . . a false story about an aunt.”

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“Now pay especial attention to this: ‘The boy’s motive for running away is unknown. He has never before been in trouble and his record in school is said to be fairly good.’” (Here Father’s voice rose to heights of impressiveness.) “‘The *Bulletin* hopes that this public warning will be a lesson to him and that he will be a better boy for it.’”

Father laid a hand upon Ranny’s arm.

“Are you sorry you brought this disgrace to the family?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Will you promise never to do it again?”

“Yes.”

“Are you sorry you made Mother so unhappy?”

Ranny felt the need of a more sprightly element in the conversation.

“Say, Father,” he said, “do you remember the time you and Jim Stoner went ‘coon-huntin’ by Yella Crick?”

Father departed abruptly, muttering, “You’d better hurry and get dressed if you want any supper.”

Gloom hung about in the middle distance as Ranny made his sketchy toilet. He was depressed over the wreck of his parents’ happiness, over the false position he was in, over the ridicule of his peers. He blamed the *Bulletin* for his troubles, he hated the whole profession from meddling reporters to dirty, tobacco-chewing pressmen. In Ranny’s personally

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conducted civilization the age of publicity had run its fitful course.

But the world of eight-going-on-nine has a limited capacity for despondency; the boy's cup of bitterness is equipped with an automatic stop-cock. And Ranny soon found that somewhere in his internal economy, in the neighborhood of the blouse-string he was now tying, there was a little flutter that was distinctly pleasurable. These bungling, long-trousered folk with their eternal talk of runaways had overplayed their parts.

As supper was nearing its end there came a breach of the peace from the direction of the street. This sound consisted of an intermittent yell, aided by the skilful vibration of a hand before the mouth—one device by which youth avoided the degrading necessity of knocking on adult doors. At the earliest moment consistent with cherry pie Ranny sped down the path and discovered that mouth and hand were the property of Bud Hicks. Thereupon, in the thickening dusk ensued this colloquy:

“'Lo, Ranny!”

“'Lo!”

“C'mon over tumorra and be in the show.”

“What show?”

“You know—like movin' pitchers—the Young Boy Runaway and everything. You can be the runaway.”

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“All right—mebbe.”

“Go’-by.”

“Go’-by.”

Bud departed, making delicious music along the picket fence with a stick.

The prospective villain of the drama came upon the side porch noiselessly, his feet having reverted to a state of nature. Through the open dining-room window he looked upon a charming domestic scene. Father had his arm about Mother’s waist and her head rested wearily upon his shoulder.

“He’s not a bad boy, Elizabeth,” Father said, “any more than I was when I ran away to go ’coon-hunting with Jim Stoner.”

“I know, Tom, but he has been so hard to understand this last year. He takes up things so intently, then suddenly loses interest in them.”

“He’s dabbling in life, dear,” said Father, and after a pause he added, “I think I’ll run down-town for a while—they’ll all be wanting to know about the little shaver.”

“All right”—Mother gave an awkward little laugh—“I wish you would stop in at the office and get five or six copies of the *Bulletin*.”

III

AUNT MARY, PREFERRED

FATHER and Mother had not cleared their minds entirely of the idea that the abortive trip to Manchester had sprung from a desire for travel and change.

When it was accordingly decided in family council that Ranny was to spend a week at Aunt Mary's in the country, that youth went forth, with a pocket full of gingersnaps, to put himself in a favorable light before his fellow-boy. The farm was always referred to in matriarchal terms because Aunt Mary was Father's own sister, while Uncle Abner Crane was merely a matrimonial incident. There was also a cousin of contemporary age to Ranny, but this fact was not for the general public, because the cousin was of the sex appropriate to the name of Dorothy. It was natural, therefore, that Ranny, having found a victim, should say:

"I'm goin' visitin' at my aunt Mary's in the country."

Bud Hicks, who had found a wabby picket in Mr.

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Webber's front fence and was making original researches as upon a loose tooth, seemed unable to rise above mere creature wants.

"Gimme sumpin' good," he said.

Ranny delivered over a gingersnap and they munched convivially in the June sunshine. It was a time of drowsy contentment. The dusty mills of learning were newly closed, and there were widespread unemployment and happiness. Presently upon a vagrant breeze came a whoop of the peculiar Tom Rucker quality.

"I gotta"—munch, munch—"Aunt Mary my *own* self," said Bud.

"Yes, you have."

"I have, too. She lives in Manchester. Ya c'n ast my mother."

Tom Rucker approached, was fed and enlightened. The three took leisure-class postures under a tree, stomachs upon the grass and bare feet pointing skyward. Tom's ears, which were connected up in a different way from the commonalty of ears, recorded each munch with a slight vibration.

"My aunt Mary," said Tom, "lives more 'n a thousand miles away."

"Who said she didn't?" Ranny had an irritable feeling about the neck-band. Aunt Marys were getting too common for comfort.

Two other boys now swelled the meeting of the

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unemployed, and Mr. Webber's outer lawn showed a promising crop of white, early June legs. The newcomers were cut off with half a gingersnap apiece, but each claimed a full share in the universal Aunt Mary.

"Everybody's got one," said Bud. "They ain't nothin' to have."

Ranny, who was growing desperate, saw with relief an elegantly dressed person approaching sedately upon the opposite side of the street. His shoes and stockings alone would have barred him from good society and his flowing necktie was an open scandal.

"I betcha Clarence Raleigh 'ain't got no Aunt Mary," said Ranny. "What 'll ya bet?"

"Well, mebbe not *Clarence*," Bud conceded, easily.

Surprised at a summons, the gilded youth picked his way carefully across the dusty street.

"You 'ain't got any Aunt Mary, have you, Clarence?" asked Ranny, hopefully.

"Oh no, I haven't got an Aunt Mary," replied Clarence, with unwonted spirit. "Not at all. I've got two, that's all I've got!"

Aunt Mary, Common, having dropped to an imperceptible figure, Ranny saw that his only hope lay in Aunt Mary, Preferred.

"I guess proba'ly nobody's got a Aunt Mary like mine," he said.

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“Good reason,” replied Bud, without going into details.

“My aunt Marys are rich,” said Clarence, “pretty near both of them.”

This preposterous remark gave rise to a favorite outdoor sport, “picking on” Clarence Raleigh, a respite especially welcome to Ranny because the bulky form of “Fatty” Hartman, a superboaster, could be seen gradually drawing near. A ginger-snap inserted into “Fatty” would have produced anywhere from three to six Aunt Marys. Public interest presently shifted to a dog which ran upon three legs, and in the ensuing leisure Ranny resolved, while visiting, to gather up Aunt Mary’s superior points as one collects horseshoe nails or bones. When he came home from the country he would show them something rather staggering.

After three days, which were long even for June, Uncle Abner came driving a dust-colored horse and brought, besides unimportant gifts of butter and eggs, some exciting information. His brother’s boy, Fred, was now visiting his country relations and playing fast and loose with the Crane landscape.

“He’s a caution—that nephew of mine,” said Uncle Abner. “I suppose when the two of them get together they won’t leave much of the poor old place.”

It was not until boy and man and dust-colored

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horse had left Lakeville behind them, and Mother's instructions about being nice to Dorothy and not giving any trouble had sunk to their proper place in the limbo of oblivion, that Ranny took up a question that had been giving him some concern.

"This boy, Fred—what relation is him an' me?"

A splotch of dried mud on the buggy-wheel made perhaps a dozen revolutions before Uncle Abner replied:

"Well, you couldn't say he's *any* relation exactly. Course he's a cousin to your cousin Dot. Maybe we could make up a word for it. Let's see now. How would second cousin-in-law do?"

Being second cousin-in-law to a "caution" was entirely satisfactory to Ranny.

"My aunt Mary's his aunt Mary, too."

"Yes," said Uncle Abner, gently. "Yes, you're both lucky that way."

The silence that followed was a little more intimate than its predecessors. Ranny kept taking cautious glances of exploration. There was something about the eyes of this tall, lanky uncle that made him look as if he were continually scared; the little whiskery patch upon his chin was like a beard that did not want to give any trouble. Uncle Abner wore a linen duster to protect his clothes, but allowed it to flap open so that it did not do so, though permitting a fine view of a life-like little cucumber upon his watch-

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chain. He sat timidly close to the end of the buggy seat and kept one foot on the step as if he would willingly get out and walk if Ranny but said the word.

Uncle Abner studied every field and cow and barn—one would think he had never been in the country before. Once he started to hum a little tune, but thought better of it. At last he spoke in evident embarrassment:

“Our farm is shaped like a piece of pie. The river curves around to make the outside crust, and it comes together toward the house.”

Ranny stowed away this good news as something that might bring Aunt Mary credit in select circles.

“I guess we’re gonta have some pie,” he said, politely.

Uncle Abner seemed to find this remark witty. For a moment it looked as though the conversation might be saved, but it went down for the third time.

When they had traveled so long and so far that Lakeville had faded in Ranny’s mind to something that had to do with his lost youth, they stopped before a farm-house. A man younger than Uncle Abner came out of the yard, picked up a stick, and opened his pocket-knife. Ranny looked at Uncle Abner and found nothing to reassure him; Uncle Abner was apparently very much frightened, his face was red, and his eyes watered. But instead of whipping up



"OUR FARM IS SHAPED LIKE A PIECE OF PIE"

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the horse and making a dash for it, he waited for the armed man to reach the buggy.

"Henry," he said, "I've got an idea about that hillside piece back there. More 'n likely I'm wrong."

To Ranny's relief the young farmer seemed mollified, and began to use the knife upon the stick.

"Go ahead, Abner," he said. "I'd like to ketch you bein' wrong once."

It was clear that Uncle Abner was in a desperate situation. What he said was entirely outside of Ranny's province—something about plowing it the other way and holding the moisture, but Henry seemed to think well of it.

"Yes—I guess that's right," he said, thoughtfully. "Yes, I'll do that. What are you askin' a pound for this—on the hoof?" Henry laid a hand upon Ranny's knee.

Uncle Abner evaded the question on the pretext that he didn't want to sell the boy until they had fattened him up, and they finally got away safely. Maybe, Ranny thought, the man wasn't angry, after all. But then why was Uncle Abner so scared? What kind of uncle was this, anyway?

"Here's where we cross the county line," said Uncle Abner at last. "Our farm begins at this fence."

Here was exciting information for the Lakeville public; Aunt Mary apparently had something to do

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with geography. But there was no time to go into this matter deeply, because they were in the yard now and Aunt Mary herself was coming out to greet them. Ranny had not been able to remember exactly how Aunt Mary looked, but now her predominating plumpness, and the round face that smiled so easily, and the series of quick, hard hugs she gave a person, seemed perfectly familiar. It was as if he had seen her only about the day before yesterday.

"Well, Dot," she said, apparently addressing the open air, "aren't you going to kiss Ranny?"

Dorothy reluctantly abandoned her hiding-place on the other side of her mother and put her face at his disposal. The rite was performed in a sketchy fashion, and Ranny hoped that it had not been observed by the dark young stranger sitting on the edge of the porch and examining his big toe in an elaborate pretense that nobody had come.

Dorothy was the first to recover from the operation. "Come on, Fred," she called out. "We have something to show Ranny, you know." This was at once a welcome, an introduction, and a promise of a lively future.

Ranny found that while a glance at an Aunt Mary establishes her upon a familiar footing, one has to get acquainted with a girl cousin over again each time because she is always changing. Dorothy had

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grown, undoubtedly, but she was still of the roly-poly school of architecture, and had not yet begun to put all her energies into the production of arms and legs. Dorothy's speech, perhaps because in her home life she was deprived of the advantages of society of her own age, was of that painful correctness affected by teachers. She was incorrigibly neat in her clothing, too. She wore shoes in the summer-time (as is so often the case with girls), her stockings were never allowed to sag, or the ribbons which secured the two braids of hair, the color of well-pulled molasses taffy, to go awry. She was the kind of girl of whom visiting ladies say in low tones, "What a beautiful child; just like a doll!" Ranny was no judge of girlish beauty, but his experience had been that the doll-like ones were the most useless of all and were constantly pestering a person to play house.

Having put his shoes and stockings and his "other clothes" where they would give him no concern until it was time to go home, Ranny joined his dainty cousin and the dark, piratical Fred for a tour of inspection. Fred aspired toward the zenith rather than toward the horizon; he was active and strong, but he had nothing to speak of in the way of thickness. While Dorothy's smile was almost chronic and she giggled without effort, it was the solemn-faced second cousin-in-law who did the ridiculous

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things. Fred was more laughed against than laughing. He had a hoarse, low voice suggesting a permanent bad cold, and whenever he said anything funny he spoke in tones of deep depression, as one trying to satisfy the teacher's curiosity about the capital of North Carolina.

Although Dorothy, smiling, was an agreeable sight rather than otherwise, Ranny had a feeling of growing irritation that the "caution" was taking a too prominent part in the entertainment. Therefore, with no settled plan, he picked up a corncob and hurled it valiantly at nothing in particular.

"Watch me sling," he said, as he let fly.

"That's nothin'," said Fred, gruffly, but his own performance did not prove remarkable in any way.

"I can throw, too," said Dorothy.

What followed was one of the great surprises of Ranny's life; it unsettled one of his profoundest convictions. The soft-looking hand of a cream-whiteness which had resisted the June sun, disdain-ing corncobs, closed upon a stone, which with unbelievable accuracy sped straight and low to an unoffending carriage-shed.

"She—she slings like a boy!" said the astonished visitor from Lakeville. "Underhand an' ever'-thing."

From that moment Dorothy was a force to be reckoned with. A girl who could throw like that

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could not be shunted off to play with dolls while important people went about seeing life. In fact, Ranny wondered whether the matter might not be mentioned cautiously to discreet people back in Lakeville.

Prominent among the phenonema of the farm was Jake, the hired man. Jake was apparently two kinds of hired man, subdued and silent when, with wet hair plastered down, he joined the family at their early supper, loquacious and self-confident when before a mixed audience of three he tyrannized over the horses and cows in the gathering dusk.

"What are you mostly, Dot," he asked, first making sure that Uncle Abner was not within ear-shot of the watering-trough, "a Crane or a Dukes?"

Dorothy laughed, but declined to analyze herself.

"Well, which cousin do you like best, Fred or Ranny?"

"I don't know, Jake," said the embarrassed hostess. "I like them both."

Jake slapped old Prince on the flank and presently returned from the stable with another thirsty horse.

"A crane is a bird with long, skinny legs," he said, helpfully, "and dukes is a kind of people that lives in foreign countries like England and Europe."

Dorothy did not care to choose between being a long-legged bird and a foreigner. "Come on, boys," she said, "let's go to the corn-crib."

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"Don't let 'em fight," Jake chuckled as they started away.

Ranny furtively sized up his distant relative, if any. Fred was undoubtedly the taller, but just the same he'd better not get smart.

"I live in Manchester," said Fred, ostensibly to Dorothy. "I bet Manchester's bigger 'n Lakeville."

"I bet it ain't," Ranny replied.

They wagered several barrels of imaginary money, but came to no decision. Their common cousin tried to shift to non-controversial themes.

"Jake can lift a calf with one hand," she said. But this well-intentioned remark only started an argument as to the relative lifting powers of Cranes and Dukeses—a disagreement that lasted until Aunt Mary called out:

"Come into the house now. My goodness! it's getting dark."

It is hard enough to go to sleep, anyway, in a strange bed and with a very strange bedfellow, without having perplexing new problems to worry about. Ranny saw that the honor of the Dukes family was in his keeping. Dorothy did not seem to care much about the matter, but Jake wanted it settled, and Fred, otherwise an interesting person, was beginning to put on airs. Ranny had never upheld the honor of a family before, and did not

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know just how it was done. In what way the Dukeses were superior to the rest of humanity? Father and Mother had never taken pains to explain. In his perplexity Ranny wished heartily that he was back where the Dukeses were a more common phenomenon. It was the first time he had ever left his family at home alone, and he wondered how everybody was getting along. His wish and wonder became something of an ache. Fortunately Fred was sleeping loudly and would never know what happened.

Whatever it was, it must have resulted in sleep, for the next thing he knew it was broad day and the crinkly-cornered eyes of Aunt Mary were laughing down upon him.

"Well, Ranny, I declare you sleep just like a Duke. Get up, boys; breakfast is ready."

Presently there were noises in Dorothy's room indicating that a person who slept like a Crane should stop doing so and get up.

At breakfast Uncle Abner introduced an embarrassing topic.

"You weren't homesick or anything last night, Ranny?"

Fred, happily, was absorbed in the question of how much syrup a pancake would hold.

"No," replied Ranny, unconvincingly, "not hardly."

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“That’s good. Fred wasn’t homesick the first night, either”—(squirming by the “caution”)—“not hardly.”

Ranny laughed with pure relief. Fred had probably cried like a baby.

The honor of the family might have rested there, while the delights of the pie-shaped farm were being investigated, but after breakfast Jake, having put on his straw hat and his other personality, took up the matter again.

“You hadn’t oughta let them two cousins come here at the same time, Dot. There’ll be trouble before the day’s over.”

Fred and Ranny glared at each other. Dorothy smoothed out her skirt and suggested that all hands go down to the river. Hostilities were averted again, but all that crowded forenoon, whether they were throwing stones into the stream which formed the crust of the piece of pie, or swinging from the hay-carrier in the big barn, or sitting chauffeur-wise upon assorted machinery in the implement-shed, or inspecting the old woods or the young lambs, the case of Crane *vs.* Dukes was with them always. Fred was constantly boasting about his prowess and that of blood relations unknown to Ranny, and yet if Ranny merely remarked in an inoffensive way that there was nothing especially wonderful about Cranes as compared with Dukeses, Fred got angry.

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By noontime Dorothy's smile had worn very thin. Ranny heard her ask Aunt Mary, "How long are the boys going to be here?" The answer was not audible, but Dorothy's face was that of one who has just received bad news.

At the dinner-table Dorothy proposed the highest-known form of entertainment.

"May we go to the tile-mill this afternoon?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so," Aunt Mary replied. "Be careful and don't hurt yourselves on the car."

"Or fall in the creek," added Uncle Abner.

"No, we won't," Dorothy promised on behalf of the trio.

Jake was in his harmless personality, and could do nothing but look depressed.

"Remember, Dot," was Aunt Mary's parting word, "Ranny and Fred are the visitors. Play nicely, and let them have their way sometimes."

For a season it looked as though Dorothy's trump card had won; the delights of the tile-mill (now deserted because of the exhaustion of the supply of clay) were so transcendent that rival families dwelt together in harmony. The roomy, shed-like structure, standing beside a creek at the extreme eastern edge of the farm, contained a number of little compartments that would have been invaluable for hide-and-seek purposes had there not been a higher and nobler sport at hand—namely, railroading. For

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down the center of the shed and out upon a low trestle through the open door ran a wooden track for a flat-car with genuine iron wheels. The motive power was the human leg, but he who pushed the car could easily drop upon his stomach from time to time and take pleasant little rides.

Dorothy was a marvel of diplomacy and self-effacement. As a working compromise she proposed the M. & L. Railroad, Manchester being the inside terminal, and Lakeville the bumper at the outer end of the trestle. The management made a point of running into this open-air city with something of a bang. Dorothy accepted an ignominious but comfortable position as a passenger, paying imaginary fares for real rides, while her troublesome cousins were alternately the noble conductor and the lordly engineer. The traveling public exhibited the proper amount of restlessness, and, no matter which city she was in, promptly wished to be transported to the other, often without abandoning her seat in the center of the car. All parties, professional and amateur, were expected to yell at bumpy places and to whoop at the terminals. Ranny had never experienced a louder or more enjoyable time.

Perhaps the edge of the diversion was beginning to grow dull, but it was Fred who brought the afternoon to ruin. It was he who conceived the hilarious idea that a conductor should be polite to ladies.

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"How do, Miss Crane?" he said, gruffly, bowing as gracefully as his position on his knees at the front end of the swaying car would permit. "Where ja wanta go?"

"I want to go to Manchester very much."

Taking advantage of her need, the conductor said, "Ten dollars," and punched a mythical ticket. Engineer Ranny, seeing this performance, broke all speed records to Manchester in order to put his new idea into effect as quickly as possible. On the return trip Conductor Ranny made an almost fatal bow, but saved himself, and asked, "How do, Miss Dukes?"

At this point the engineer went on strike and the train stopped.

"Her name ain't Dukes," said Fred. "What's the matter with ya?"

"'Tis, too. I guess I'm the conductor."

"'Tain't, either. Is it, Dot?"

But the traveler did not propose to become involved in the crew's disagreements.

"It's no matter what my name is. I want to go to Lakeville." Dorothy affected the hopeless look of one upon whom the habit of going to Lakeville has been fastened in early life.

Fred took hold of the rolling stock of the M. & L. Railroad as if to pull it back toward his favorite terminal, but Ranny tugged the other way. The

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result was the worst tie-up in the history of the line. Failing to get the train, Ranny laid hands upon outlying portions of the traveling public—more specifically, Dorothy's feet. In rebuttal Fred seized the unfortunate passenger under the arms. The public-service corporation braced its various knees against the ends of the train and pulled. Just what either of them wanted with Dorothy was not clear, but a bystander might have thought they were trying to divide their mutual cousin into her component hereditary parts.

Even a passenger will turn. The wrath which Dorothy had been storing in her batteries all day came forth with galvanic upheaval. In its broader outlines her plan seemed to be to strike Fred at any convenient place with her fists and to kick her maternal relative in the stomach. The railroaders fell back baffled; and just as things looked darkest for the M. & L. system its financial support slipped away and started for home.

Ranny was so scandalized by this inhospitable conduct that when his breath came back his speech lost all restraint. "Doggon her!" he gasped. "Her mother told her to play nice!"

"She hadn't ought to hit a fella in the nose," said the scion of the house of Crane.

Abandoning the bankrupt line, they set off in pursuit. The culprit had secured something of a

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start, but it could be seen that she was wasting time in a détour, and that clever people could cut across the low, bumpy ground nearer the creek and head her off. Fred, being a little in advance, was the one to get into the swamp and fall down. Warned by this amusing disaster, Ranny took a middle course consisting largely of blackberry brambles hostile to bare legs. When he finally emerged upon high ground Dorothy was out of sight and Fred was trying to wash off the muck at the creek without violating Uncle Abner's instructions about falling in.

Not caring for his society, Ranny went back to the house by a procedure of his own, consisting in part of tearing his trousers on a barbed-wire fence, of getting lost for a season in the edge of the woods, and finally of being frightened by a cow which had no business getting up so suddenly when a person was going past. During what remained of the afternoon two boys could be observed popping in and out of widely separated sheds and stables, obviously unaware of each other's existence. Dorothy had apparently adopted a girl's prerogative of staying in the house. When the supper-bell sounded, Ranny's body, slightly scratched, was in a loft over the corn-crib, but his untrammelled soul was in Lakeville with Tom Rucker and "Fatty" Hartman and such sprightly non-relations.

That evening three strangers graced Aunt Mary's

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table—strangers, that is, to one another. They were addressed by their host in such terms as: "Have some more beans, Fred? You, Dot? Ranny, you're not eating." The unnatural silence finally proved to be too much for Uncle Abner. "What's the matter here, anyway? You folks had a falling out?"

Dorothy shattered another of Ranny's favorite ideas—that girls are always tattle-tales. Fred confined his gaze to edibles, and Jake shook his head as one whose worst fears have been realized. Ranny was overwhelmed with the futility of life; the remaining days of his visit stretched out bleak and endless before him. He did not speak, but out of a number of possible courses he chose the worst. The grief that was in his heart rose to his throat and clogged it up, then overflowed through his eyes. With a sob that tried unsuccessfully to be a cough he slid from his chair and left the room by the stairway door. A moment later he was gazing out of the window of the guest bedroom, but seeing nothing of any value. Presently the door opened and admitted the only admirable character for miles around.

"Won't you tell me about it, Ranny? Maybe I can straighten things out." The laughter was gone from Aunt Mary's eyes now, but there was something appealing and comforting in its place. Yet it proved hard to put the trouble into words.

"Fred says—the farm an' horses an' Dot an'

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ever'thing b'longs to Uncle Abner. He says Cranes is stouter 'n Dukeses—an' slings better, an' Manchester's bigger 'n Lakeville, an' he thinks he's so smart."

"I see," said Aunt Mary. "And what does Dot say about it?"

"Nothin'. We pulled her a little an' she got mad at me an' Fred an' went home." It was not for him to reveal Dorothy's unladylike act of kicking a conductor in the stomach.

"Who started the trouble about Cranes and Dukeses, anyway?"

"I—I guess it was Jake."

"Oh, I see." Aunt Mary seemed relieved at this news. "Your uncle Abner will have to give Jake a talking to."

"Uncle Abner 'd be scared."

"No, Ranny, you've made a mistake about Uncle Abner. He gets embarrassed when he has to talk to people, but he goes ahead just the same. I don't suppose there's a farmer for five miles around that Uncle Abner hasn't helped in some way."

Ranny remembered without enthusiasm yesterday's encounter with "Henry." Nothing mattered now. Aunt Mary, whom he had counted upon, had gone over to the Crane camp and was shamelessly praising her husband.

"Your uncle Abner always was a little shy."

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Aunt Mary was smiling now as one who remembers something. "A long time ago, when I was a girl and your uncle was a young man, he got the habit of coming over to our house. He didn't tell anybody why he came, but I had a pretty good idea. One spring night he started over to ask me a very important question, but when he got near our gate he lost his courage and ran for the woods." Aunt Mary chuckled softly and Ranny dropped into the chair by the window. This was rapidly developing into a very good story. "I guess he thought he'd be safe from me there. It was very dark in the woods, but he went in farther and farther, and at last he heard a cry in the direction of the river. He followed the sound and kept answering until he reached the bank. The cry for help seemed to come from the middle of the river, which was rushing very fast, as it does in the spring. He plunged into the pitch-black water and swam toward the voice; he found a boy clinging to a snag and almost ready to let go. Abner Crane got the boy out and carried him home. The boy was about sixteen then; he was my younger brother. He's a big man now, and runs a wagon factory, and has a boy named Ranny."

"Father!"

"Yes, Ranny. Nobody in our family ever called Abner Crane afraid after that night."

Gazing thoughtfully out of the window, with his

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face resting upon one hand, Ranny scarcely sensed Aunt Mary's noiseless departure from the room. He was reveling in relaxed responsibility—the honor of the family had been taken care of long before he was born. He could make peace with Fred now; Dorothy could be a Crane to her heart's content. Suddenly his mind went racing over the long, dusty miles to Lakeville—for what is glory unless they know about it in the home town? A county line and a pie-shaped farm, a river and a tile-mill and a girl that throws like a boy—these things were all very fine in their way. But the best thing about Aunt Mary was Uncle Abner.

Ranny returned from his mental wanderings to the sound of a stifled little giggle and the touch of a pair of soft hands clapped over his eyes.

“Dot!” he guessed, amiably.

His cousin laughingly released him and stepped back, revealing Fred, who seemed to be struggling with impending speech.

“Hey, Ranny,” he said, in his low, solemn tones, “I know a fine trick we c’n play on ol’ Jake.”

IV

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RANNY had been accumulating experience for eight-going-on-nine years and thought he had the main facts of life pretty well under control, but it was not until one breathless August day of bands and bunting and a lemonade-stand at which they gave one very little for a nickel, that he learned of that high wall that divides the world into two classes, Our Party and the Enemies of Society. For a week rumors had been trickling in upon Ranny's dusty field of activities that this Thursday was to be somehow superior to all other possible Thursdays; billboards admitted as much, and the *Bulletin* had been hammering at the matter night after night. A great man—a Senator, in fact—was to come and sound the key-note, and there was to be such an outpouring, the *Bulletin* said, of the friends of prosperity and law and order and the flag and those who remembered Valley Forge, as would sweep the county into the victorious ranks of righteousness on the sixth day of next November. Ranny remembered

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Valley Forge perfectly, but he had been occupied of late with the activities of a hoop-rolling club and had not given these more remote matters the attention they seemed to deserve. Upon the morning of Thursday itself an event occurred which convinced Ranny of its unique place in history.

"Well," said Father, as the Dukes breakfast was drawing to a close, "there's a lot going on to-day. I suppose a young politician must have money to spend."

To Ranny's gratified amazement Father reached into his pocket and delivered over a quarter. And though Mother tried to destroy the value of the gift by hedging it about with conditions—such as not eating too much and getting sick—the young politician was of no use in practical affairs until he had broken home ties and started off in search of band music. On the way down-town he encountered Tom Rucker, who cheerfully agreed to help him spend his money.

The largest voluntary donation in Ranny's memory should have prepared him for anything, yet he was astounded at the change that had taken place in the business section of Lakeville. Bunting adorned the store-fronts and a great flag was suspended from the *Bulletin* office over the street, bearing at its lower end the slogan, "Perkins and Prosperity." A lemonade-stand had sprouted mushroom-like at

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the curb, and upon the court-house lawn men were putting eleventh-hour touches upon a speaker's stand and benches of fragrant yellow lumber, with a by-product of sticks and sawdust. At the most important corner the "Jamestown Silver Cornet Band" (a person had to invert himself to read it all on the bass drum) stood in a circle dispensing melody, and here, before half an hour had passed, Ranny fraternized with all the youth of his wide acquaintance and several total strangers who wore shoes and stockings. Although they came from another town, these fops were not insulted, but only stared at; at festive times the ordinary duties of life may be neglected. Boys whom Ranny knew intimately in private life were holding sheets of music and ostentatiously ignoring the friends of humbler days. One of these animated music-racks was "Fatty" Hartman, who danced attendance upon a slide-trombone player. "Fatty's" soul was really with the bass-drummer across the circle; his head was turned in almost the opposite direction from that of nature's plan and his hands did very much as they pleased. As a result "Fatty" was not only poked slightly, but at the end of the "Washington Post March" was relieved of further responsibilities. The trombonist held that no human being could read music waved about in that eccentric way. "Wadda you think I am," he said in part, "a giraffe?"

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Pulling Tom aside, Ranny proposed that they set about the main business of the day. Tom was all for Lem White's ice-cold lemonade.

"They ain't very big," said Ranny, regarding the sample glasses set out upon the counter.

Tom admitted that charge.

"Have some candy, then," said the vender, who was pouring some alluring pink paint over a rope of taffy.

They indulged in taffy and in the ensuing thirst they also bought lemonade. This they found as lacking in strength as in quantity.

"Le's go over to the pump and git another one," said the guest, with brutal frankness.

"What do you want for a nickel?" asked the irritable Lem White, who at less stirring times worked in the livery-stable and found politics something of a nervous strain. "Some people makes me tired."

This speech cost him dearly, for his late patrons stood about for some time warning young spend-thrifts that Lem's lemonade was no bargain.

When Tom and Ranny had nothing left to spend but time they rejoined their companions. Train No. 9, welcomed in person, proved to contain a great delegation from near-by villages, including another band. The band had to be marched with back to the public square and compared unfavorably

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with that of Jamestown. At a quarter to twelve the rumor was passed about that free buttons could be obtained at the Young Men's Perkins Club. Ranny went home to a perfunctory dinner with an itchy feeling in the neck-band, due to sawdust, a lack of interest in food, and a button proclaiming that he was for Perkins and Prosperity.

Two o'clock found Lakeville's rarest spirits crowded upon the top of a freight-car upon a siding near the depot. Ranny suddenly noticed that there was something the matter with Tom.

"Hey, where's your button?" he asked.

"Aw, my father wouldn't let me wear it. I ain't for Perkins. I'm for Chan'ler."

Ranny searched the familiar freckled face, half expecting the fancy movable ears to give a derisive "wiggle." But Tom was incredibly serious.

"Why ain't you f'r Perkins?" Ranny asked.

"He's a tool of the int'res'. My father said so his own self."

"I bet he ain't."

"What 'll you bet?"

Ranny wagered a nominal million and appealed to Bud Hicks, a political authority who wore upon his blouse three Perkins-and-Prosperity buttons as well as one which inquired, "Is it hot enough for you?"

"Aw, whatcha talkin' about?" Bud demanded of

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the luckless Tom. "Course not." A straw vote of the top of the box-car revealed not one person who would believe evil of their favorite candidates, Perkins and Prosperity.

"What did you do with the button?" asked Bud, the prominent collector.

Tom produced the emblem and traded it for Bud's innocuous remark about the weather. Bud was now for Perkins and Prosperity three times on his blouse and once on his cap.

The great man came at last in a special train which exercised its right to be late. The home band which led the procession to the court-house yard had a drum-major whose unseasonable fur hat was the highest that had been seen in town that day.

The boys, by superior squirming and dodging, got excellent seats at the very front where they could hear every word if they cared for that sort of thing. A glee club poked delicious fun at Tom Rucker's candidate, and a man of local renown made a speech of introduction. This was "Colonel" Bacon, who wagged his head earnestly; he seemed to shake out his words as one shakes balls out of a Roman candle. Finally the sounder of key-notes arose.

"The remarks of your chairman," he began, when quiet was restored, "remind me of the story of the Irishman—" Ranny did not get the full meaning

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of the joke, but joined the freight-car contingent in the applause.

The applause, however, was not unanimous. Tom refused to be swept away from his hereditary principles by mere oratory. In fact, after the great man had slumped into exports and imports and national debts, Tom went so far as to say:

“Le’s git out; this ain’t no good.”

Bud Hicks also found that he had all the statesmanship his system craved and there was a general exodus of squirmers and dodgers. But Ranny, who did not take his convictions lightly, elected to stay and suffer for Perkins and Prosperity.

It was no easy martyrdom. The afternoon was torrid, the great man floundered in statistics, and little creatures came up out of the grass and bit the ankles of the friends of law and order and Valley Forge. Ranny was almost ready to surrender when suddenly he detected a new quality in the Senator’s address, a quavery and shivery note:

“And when, on the sixth day of next November, the sun sinks to rest behind the western hills—” It was glorious and thrilling and it ended in a tumult of applause. The great man himself sank to rest, the glee club predicted overwhelming victory, and Ranny was free to associate with merely pleasant people.

In the late afternoon in front of the hitherto

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attractive Rucker homestead he made one last appeal to the better side of Tom's nature.

"Aw, come on an' be f'r Perkins," he said. "Nobody ain't f'r Chan'ler."

"They are, too."

"Who?"

"Lots of people."

"Jus' tell me one."

"My father an'—lots of people."

"If you ain't f'r Perkins you'll be sorry—that's all."

"What 'll *you* do?" asked Tom, scornfully.

"It's all right what I'll do." Ranny was sparring for time. "You'll find out soon enough."

The next morning Tom was missing from the activities of the hoop-rolling association of which he was a prominent member. The object of the organization was to conduct races, preferably over the bumpy place in Webber's cement sidewalk. Tom had been an ornament to this diversion; he could go fast or slow, and he was an artist at turning corners. His absence hurt the sport, but it led to a great idea.

"Who you for?" Ranny asked "Fatty" Hartman, who on this hot morning was only a theoretical hoop-roller. From his recumbent position "Fatty" ranged himself upon the side of law and order. There was no point in asking Bud Hicks, for Bud had un-

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earthed further Perkins and Prosperity buttons and a badge marked, "Usher." Ted Blake, a doubtful non-voter, was open to conviction.

"I tell you," said Ranny, "le's be the— I tell you—"

"Well, tell us," said "Fatty," tolerantly.

"Listen a minute, can't you? Le's be the Perkins an' Prosper'ty Hoop Club."

"Whatta we hafta do?" asked "Fatty."

The object of the new society seemed to be to keep traitors from enjoying life.

"Nobody can't belong if they ain't f'r Perkins," Ranny explained—"Tom Rucker, or anybody like that."

Ted Blake accepted membership on condition that Bud Hicks give him a button, his own having been sold for a mess of pottage. Ted volunteered to inform Tom of his non-election to the new club. Tom sent back word that he didn't care in the least, that they all thought they were smart, and that Chandler was the people's champion.

"Yes, he is," said Ranny. "Where'd he hear that?"

"He said it was in the *News*," Ted reported.

"That paper ain't no good," said Bud. "It only comes out once a week. They don't have carriers or anything. A big boy turns the printin'-press by hand."

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All enjoyed hearty snickers at the absurd little sheet with its boy-power press, and the work of building up the new organization was begun. Every youth who came along was asked, "Who you for?" and, if satisfactory, was taken into the club. Clarence Raleigh was not sure, but would go home and ask his mother. He never came back, either because his political complexion was wrong or because his mother didn't want him to become overheated.

Along with recruiting went racing, practising, and informal yelling. When Mr. Webber came home from the store at twelve he seemed to regard the breach of the peace as excessive.

"What's all this?" he asked. "There's too much hullabaloo around here."

"This is the Perkins an' Prosper'ty Hoop Club," said Ranny. "We're—we're having a meeting."

"Sounds more like a whoop club," said Mr. Webber, but his face relaxed, and he made no further protest against hullabaloo. Evidently Mr. Webber was not only a reliable druggist, but sound politically.

Perhaps it was the doubly reliable druggist who carried the good news down-town. At any rate, the *Bulletin* paid tribute to the new organization in a short article entitled, "Rolling on to Victory," in which the Republic was pronounced out of danger,

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not only this year, but in the future. The rising generation had its eyes open; the forces of disruption would find no comfort there. The *Bulletin* furthermore supposed that the Perkins and Prosperity Hoop Club would henceforth be found in the parades of the friends of progress.

The parade idea was well received by Randolph Harrington Dukes. "Could we do it?" he asked Father that night as the article was being read and reread.

Father pretended that the thing was highly unlikely, but undid all his work by agreeing to supply bunting with which the patriots were to wrap their hoops in case of parade. Henceforth Ranny searched the paper for news of rallies, key-notes, and outpourings.

For a time Perkins and Prosperity rolled on without hindrance. The hoop club prospered and Tom's attempt to get up a rival among the friends of the people met with gratifying failure. But when August gave way to September and nights were beginning to be cool and education was mobilizing its grim hosts, there was a rude awakening for country-savers.

The first intimation of trouble came from Father. "Better stay around home to-day," he said one morning. "There will be a lot of rough characters in town."

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“What’s goin’ on?” asked Ranny, who had seen nothing in the *Bulletin* to justify alarm.

“There’s a Chandler rally,” said Father. “This is Tom Rucker’s day, not yours.”

Ranny got out his hoop for patriotic exercises, but instead of companions he got only strains of distant music. To be sure, it was not his day—but bands are bands and patriots are partly human.

“I s’pose I could go down-town a little bit,” he said to Mother, “jus’ to see what the ol’ thing looks like. I bet it’s no good.”

Mother had a special form of laugh for jokes upon Father and she employed it now.

“Well, I’m sure Father wouldn’t mind. But look out for the rough characters.”

So Ranny, resolved to be scornful of everything, started down-town to see how the other half lived.

The few familiar blocks had taken on an ominous air. The streets were full of rough characters driving in from the country in dusty teams and automobiles. If he had not known better, Ranny might have thought that these characters looked strangely like those who came to town for Saturday trading and very little rougher than those of the celebrated Thursday. Far worse was the display of bunting and Chandler pictures in the homes of people hitherto supposed loyal to the Republic—homes where Ranny had come and gone safely for years. There was the

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house of Mr. Harrington, who was a kind of relation to Mother, though of a nature too complicated to be understood. As long as Ranny could remember he and Mr. Harrington had possessed a joke in common; the genial elderly man always threatened to cut off Ranny's ears, but while searching vainly for his ear-cutter as often as not he found a penny. Ranny resolved never to play this game with Mr. Harrington again. If the man had turned against his country—!

The morning was one long disillusion. The Chandlerites made shameless use of the flag, the court-house yard, and the railroad. Lem White sold weak lemonade to the unjust as well as the just. Only the *Bulletin* office was loyally unaware that anything was going on.

On the street corner the venal Jamestown Silver Cornet Band was playing the same old tunes. And what was Ranny's horror to find "Fatty" Hartman holding sheet-music for the enemies of society. "Fatty" was now working for an unimportant horn that went *oom blah, oom blah*. To his exacting duties he brought all his native lack of concentration and of musical talent. His discharge from the band was all that saved his membership in the hoop club.

But Ranny's effort to discipline erring hoop-rollers broke down completely over the distressing case of Bud Hicks. That exterior decorator had found the source of Chandler buttons. Bud was now for



BUD WAS NOW FOR PERKINS ON THE LEFT SIDE OF HIS JACKET, BUT
STOOD WITH CHANDLER ON THE RIGHT

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Perkins and Prosperity on the left side of his jacket, but stood with Chandler and the people on the right. The best that Ranny could get out of him was a whispered admission that he was still for good government.

It was impossible not to see how Tom Rucker was carrying on. Tom was spending money like water. He haunted the buttered-popcorn wagon and came back again and again for peanuts in the one-cent size. Once he was discovered coming out of Alleston's grocery-store with a blissful and lumpy face. Ranny's too tolerant companions accepted refreshment, but the leading spirit of the hoop club declined to take Chandler candy into his pure young system. Ranny was of the stuff of which fanatics are made.

Being under no obligation to suffer statistics on the court-house lawn, he spent the afternoon in the neighborhood of his own home. The entertainment there, though unobjectionable, was of a low class. With the hoop-rollers out following strange gods, the time dragged wearily. The only light in the gloom was the arrival of the *Evening Bulletin*, which asserted that although the fine weather and the artificial stimulus of bands and bunting had brought out a fair-sized crowd, there was a notable lack of enthusiasm. It was evident that the efforts of the Chandlerites to stampede the country by the ex-

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penditure of vast sums of money had already failed. Fortunately for Ranny's peace of mind, the Dukes home was not one of those which contaminated itself weekly with the *News*.

While the nation's future hung suspended it seemed foolish for the processes of education to begin again, but the authorities did not see things in that light and school opened as usual. Nor was Tom barred from the class by his subversive views. Relations continued strained, but only upon political questions. In the ordinary affairs of life it was manifestly impossible to associate only with persons of sound opinions.

On an October Saturday another great rally of the friends of progress brought back the weaker brothers and the Perkins and Prosperity Hoop Club was allowed to march in the parade under the banner, "Rolling On to Victory." Rolling did not prove entirely practical, owing to the tendency of the bunting-covered hoops at the low speed to run off and mingle with the body politic, so the young man in charge of the section decreed that they be carried in the hand. Tom Rucker declared openly at the school-house pump on the following Monday that the hoop-rolling on that occasion had been the worst in his experience. Water was poured upon Tom for his frankness.

The fateful day in the nation's history came at last,

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sunshiny and crisp—"regular Perkins weather," Father said, on the theory that rough characters would come out on any kind of day, but the better element could not be expected to save their country if the weather was inclement. Ranny and his associates inspected the various polling-places and stood about until chased away by special marshals who thought they were smart. No holiday had ever passed so slowly, and Ranny thought the sun was never going to sink to rest behind the western hills—as though some modern Joshua were interfering with astronomy.

Supper was an empty form, for the organizer of the hoop club had been granted, for distinguished services, the boon of going with Father to hear the returns. It was named in the bond that if necessary they would stay up until midnight. Father chose the rooms of the Young Men's Perkins Club, which by eight o'clock were filled with the better element and cigar smoke. Ranny was jovially greeted on all sides and was frequently asked whether he voted the ticket straight.

When conversation had succumbed to violent pounding upon a table "Colonel" Bacon arose with a yellow paper in his hand and shook out the following words:

"Pennsylvania: Thirteen precincts out of twelve hundred and eighty-nine in Allegheny County give

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Chandler nine hundred and sixty-five; Perkins"—rhetorical pause followed by triumphant blast—"two thousand two hundred and thirty-seven!"

There was deafening applause to which Ranny contributed a voice of high efficiency. When the tumult had subsided somebody wanted to know how those precincts had stood four years ago, but the chairman had no time for such quibbles because the third ward of Youngstown, Ohio, had just crawled upon the rock of sound government by a majority of twenty-three.

Ranny found himself singularly calm in the hour of triumph. How easy it was to save a country when everybody helped a little, with hoops and all. His only fear now was that the thing would be settled so quickly that Father would take him home long before midnight. In Ranny's ideal world the nation would be saved at eleven forty-five.

Announcements became more frequent as the evening grew older. Sometimes the chairman leafed through a number of telegrams and chose those from the most important States. Even so the news was not invariably good and at times there were headshakings. Once Father distinctly said to another man, "That's bad." Still the Perkins figures continued to be both large and loud. At this point Ranny decided to subject Tom Rucker to ridicule for a day or two before forgiving him.

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At last the chairman made a surprising announcement.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it is growing late and most of us are tired out with the work of the campaign. I suggest that we repair to our homes." He said that the rural districts, the backbone of sound government, were always the last to be heard from, and the morning would show the complete triumph of Perkins and Prosperity. He proposed three rousing cheers for the entire ticket, national, State, and county. When they got outside, Ranny was grieved to find that the court-house clock showed only half past ten.

As they passed the office of the ridiculous *News* uncouth noises poured forth from the lighted rooms of the Chandler club up-stairs.

"What 're *they* a-hollerin' for?" Ranny asked Father, who seemed to have grown strangely silent in the last hour. "Mebbe they think they won."

For some time Ranny was to remember how happy he was when he made that ignorant speech. With it the heyday of youth was closed—at least for repairs.

"They did, son." Father seemed to part with these words with deep regret. "Chandler is elected."

"But the m-man said—"

"I know. Bacon won't admit it for three weeks."

"Mebbe in the morning it will be all differ'nt."

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“No, Ranny. Things always get more-so over-night.”

The last defense was gone. So with aching throat and holding tight to a warm and comforting hand, Ranny plodded homeward through a cheerless Chandlery world.

“What ’re we goin’ to do?” he found voice at last to inquire. He had a vague idea that they might move to some civilized country like Mexico or Beluchistan, but Father seemed to think his son was proposing armed resistance.

“The election is over and we are all good Americans now. We’ll take our licking and stand by the President. Four years from now,” he added, perhaps a little inconsistently, “the people will be good and sick of him.”

“Is Chan’ler people good Americans, too?”

“Yes, in their way. The best American I know is for Chandler—though she doesn’t talk about it much.”

The political structure which Ranny had built upon reading, yelling, and hoop-rolling came tumbling about his ears. By the time he reached home his universe had reverted to chaos.

At school next day Tom Rucker’s face wore a grin that threatened to become chronic. He wriggled his ears without stint, made a free earthquake for people of all parties by wedging his knees under his

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desk and vibrating, and finally he received dishonorable mention for drawing a caricature of Perkins (so labeled) recumbent, with toes pointing toward the sky. His conduct did not make things easy, but Ranny was tired of being separated from people by party lines. So at recess he isolated Tom and took the conversation by the forelock thus:

“Well, I’m glad we won.”

Tom was so astonished that he lost the power of speech and uttered only weird sounds.

“What’s the matter with ya?” he presently succeeded in saying. “Are ya crazy or what? Perkins got licked awful.”

“How do *you* know I’m f’r Perkins? Mebbe I’m f’r”—the word did not come easy—“Ch-Chan’ler.”

Tom made gestures of deep despair.

“How could ya be f’r Chan’ler? A person has to be what their father is.”

Randolph Harrington Dukes offered the following amendment:

“A person has to be what their father is, or their *mother*.”

V

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WHILE the nation hung hesitant between Ranny's paternal and maternal candidates for President the ordinary processes of nature were by no means suspended. The summer gave way to autumn in the old familiar fashion; days shortened, nights became frosty, walnuts ripened. It was at this season—early walnut-time, to be exact—that Ranny and his contemporaries, pushed by Tug Wiltshire, took their first plunge into high finance.

Tug Wiltshire, east-warder and bookworm, was forever reading things in papers and magazines and introducing disturbing ideas into real life. The custom was to ridicule these notions first and adopt them afterward. It was Tug who organized a polar expedition, which might have deprived society of one of its chief ornaments but for the fact that the water was only two feet deep at the point where "Fatty" Hartman fell through the ice. Tug could be expected to break out at any time without warning. Therefore the select group of volunteer

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walnut-hullers in Ranny's back yard were not greatly surprised when Tug fell over the fence into their midst and introduced philately.

"Lookie here what I got," said Tug, absently brushing the dirt from his knee. He displayed a sheet of paper upon which were loosely fastened a number of ridiculous alien postage-stamps.

"Fatty" Hartman, who yielded to none in the speed with which he abandoned anything resembling work, took the absurdity in his hand and left a thumb-print in walnut stain.

"What is it, anyway?" he asked.

"It's called a 'proval sheet," replied Tug. "You see them there? Them's postage-stamps of all nations."

"What 're they good f'r?"

Tug tried to put the thing in such a way as to appeal to "Fatty's" practical nature.

"S'posen you wanta write a letter to somebody in them countries."

"Fatty" gave the paper another examination.

"I don't *know* anybody in Hellygoland," he said.

In a short time all the fickle walnut-hullers had grabbed the "approval sheet" from one another and looked it over. If Tug Wiltshire had been done away with in Ranny's back yard that October Saturday morning a finger-print expert would easily have identified as those present "Fatty" Hartman, Bud

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Hicks, and Tom Rucker—besides Ranny himself. As far as these characters were concerned the approval sheet was badly named; they all agreed that they had never seen anything less important or desirable.

“I answered a ad. in a boys’ magazine,” the owner thus explained his misfortune. “I only had to send ten cents.”

Tom Rucker’s most sacred feelings were outraged by this admission.

“Ya paid ten cents for them things?” he asked. “Are ya crazy or what? What ’re ya goin’ to do with them?”

“I’m goin’ to sell ’em and make money, like it said in the paper. Don’t you s’pose I can read?”

“Who ya goin’ to sell ’em to?” asked Ranny.

Although devoted to literature, Tug was not without knowledge of practical affairs. It was no secret in Lakeville that Ranny was always more or less capitalistic on Saturday forenoon—more in the morning and less as the day wore on. The weekly dime which Ranny extorted from his mother for alleged work, labor, and services was as much an established institution as the thirty cents which Arthur Wilson got every week for sweeping out the First National Bank—and was more accessible to the masses. It was not ignorance, then, but low cunning which prompted Tug’s reply:

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“Well, I knew they wasn’t nobody *here* had any money.”

Not only the “remittance man,” but his penniless friends as well, were angry at this slander. In defense of his reputation for solvency Ranny parted with his entire six cents for three canceled stamps of nations for which he had only distaste because they occurred in geography.

“I’ll learn him if I ain’t got any money—the ol’ east-warder!” said Ranny, after Tug had departed with his humiliation and profits.

“I betcha,” said Bud Hicks, “I can get more stamps than Tug—er anybody.”

“I know a person that’s got some crazy stamps,” put in Tom Rucker.

“Who?” came a chorus of young voices.

“It’s all right who. Mebbe I want ’em my own self.”

“Does America stamps count?” asked “Fatty,” who had neither money nor friends at foreign courts.

Ranny had some American stamps that had come upon the summer’s letters from the teacher, so he ruled that they did count; and as nobody had information to the contrary, it was so ordered.

Before three days had passed the infant industry, which had been started for the purpose of putting Tug Wiltshire into his proper place, was able to toddle about on its own feet. Tug, having made a

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quick "turnover," put his profits back into the business and sent to the nearest metropolis for more outlandish stamps. Others dug up odds and ends of postage from amateur sources. Tom Rucker's *sub rosa* acquaintance proved to be Mrs. Thompson, whose New York son had once been to Europe and had written home descriptions of the same at the cost of various pence, centimes, and pfennigs. Mrs. Thompson, torn between love of Tom and duty toward her son's historic trip, compromised by giving away one stamp of each variety. Tom brought back to general society the idea that one must get as many different kinds as possible and that extras didn't count. This principle, promptly accepted, led to violent trading. Miss Mills, who had sometimes despaired of getting the young idea to shoot at geography, might have been cheered had she seen Bud Hicks trying to trade a "twenty-cent Dutchland" to Ted Blake for a "ten-cent Sweden." The short-sighted foreign policy of marking stamps with "d" and "pf" and "ore" had caused such difficulties that the boys had swept away these provincial distinctions and made the honest "cent" international.

Although Mrs. Thompson and other owners of attics and waste-paper baskets had to endure some noisy popularity in the days that followed, their lot was happy compared with that of the hyphenated citizens. Jacob Huffman, junk-dealer and business

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associate of the young, who was vaguely understood to have hailed from "Europe or somewhere," was much sought after, and choice rags and bones were dangled before him. But Jacob's friends in Europe or somewhere must have been illiterate, for he could produce nothing in the way of postage-stamps. Mr. Engle, who ministered to the inner public with "Delicatessen and Lunch," parted first with all his "twenty-cent Dutchlands" and later with his habitual good nature. Toward the end of the week a boy entering the delicatessen-shop even upon a commercial errand did so at his own risk.

Ranny, who had begun to fall behind in the race for philatelic prestige, decided that he might recoup his fortunes by a stroke of diplomacy. His plan was based upon the radical theory that Wung Lee would not cut off the ears of any boy bearing business, and he got permission at home to do his will with Father's collars, which ordinarily went to the patriotic laundry west of the livery-stable. The Chinaman accepted his patronage without offering physical violence and Ranny was encouraged to ask:

"Mr. Lee—h-have you—could you give me any China stamps—you know, like they come on letters?" His gesture was meant to illustrate stamps coming on letters.

The Oriental made some remark, which Ranny did not catch, and disappeared into the back room, which

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was known to hold some pretty dark secrets, as well as a trunkful of elegant brass money. Not knowing whether the laundryman had gone after stamps or some Oriental instrument of torture, Ranny retreated half-way to the door so as to be prepared in either case. The story, however, proved to have a happy ending. The Chinaman gave him five utterly unreasonable stamps. They were alike, but the duplicates would have high trading value because they came from a country which, gossip said, was directly underneath Lakeville and upside down.

Toward the end of the week somebody discovered that it was not necessary to pay Tug Wiltshire's excessive prices, as any person who was in funds could send ten cents to a stamp company and get an approval sheet of his own. But boy finance was built upon a copper standard and dimes were scarce. It was Arthur Wilson, financial expert, who suggested a way out of the difficulty. Arthur had already used his bank connection to get permission to examine the old letters in the cellar. These had yielded chiefly three-cent stamps of an ancient vintage. Arthur had made the mistake of flooding the market with these and presently they were so common that it was almost a disgrace to own one.

Though Arthur held a thirty-cent position at a tender age, he was not a self-made boy. He had got his job because his uncle was bookkeeper in the bank

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—a case of nepotism, rather than solid merit. Yet a person who daily sprinkled and swept near so much money and who had once been allowed to lift ten thousand dollars could not be disregarded when he said, “I tell you what le’s do—le’s organize a company.”

This was on Friday after school, as some prominent collectors and connoisseurs were advancing toward Arthur’s place of wage-slavery. Unfamiliar words always appealed to “Fatty” Hartman’s comic spirit.

“Organize, organize,” he said; “that’s a fancy word.” For a while no serious thought was possible because “Fatty” was offering to “organize” everybody—with pain.

“Every fellow puts in some money,” Arthur explained. “Whatever they have. An’ then we’ll send off and get a lot of fine stamps and sell ’em and make money and buy some more and—”

“Yeah, where’d we git anything to put in?” This cold water was supplied by Tom Rucker.

But Tom’s pessimism, “Fatty’s” jocularities, and Ranny’s hazy suspicion of stock companies all fell in turn before dreams of riches. They deposited Arthur at his bank with the understanding that the organization would take place the next morning in the furnace-heated, brick-floored cellar of the Wilson home and that nobody was to make too much noise. All must shake savings-banks or pester parents, for

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any person without money would be put out of the cellar. Meanwhile Arthur would ask his uncle how companies were organized. The only thing he was quite clear about was that the one who "thought it up" must be president.

Thus by one means or another funds were raised and there was an impressive gathering of the opulent at Wilson's outside cellar door Saturday forenoon. Ranny had his week's wages and two cents in petty cash. Arthur Wilson showed his faith in the future by displaying a quarter. Two and three cents per capita were normal and there was a light sprinkling of nickels. "Fatty" Hartman, who, because of his appetite for sweets, was always in financial distress, tried to make a winning personality serve as an entrance fee, but business was business and he was refused admittance.

"I tell you," said Ranny, "I'll lend 'im two cents. Is that all right?"

Arthur's uncle had not said anything to prevent Ranny's lending petty cash to "Fatty" Hartman, so it was permitted.

"You gotta pay it back," was Ranny's hard condition, "an' you gotta be on my side—an' ever'-thing."

"Fatty" cheerfully mortgaged his personal liberty and became a stockholder. What, by his entrance, the meeting gained in bulk it lost in decorum.

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The Wilson basement was splendidly equipped with boxes and boards with which to construct resting-places for tired business men. Also there was a table which came within one leg of being perfect. A little carpentry made this strong enough to bear pounding, and Arthur elected himself president by keeping possession of the hammer. He advanced the opinion that he should also be "treasury."

"I oughta be treasury," shouted Ranny. "I got ten cents." He repeated this in even louder tones so as to attract the attention of his bondman, who was combining pleasure with business by pinching Tom Rucker's knee. "Fatty" arose *en masse* and made a demonstration that threatened to wreck the seating arrangements—he was always something of a problem in a room containing furniture.

"If ya don't make Ranny treasury," he shouted, "I'll—I'll organize the whole shebang!"

Ted Blake put no faith in this promise. "I like to see you try," he said.

There was a delightful uproar and Ted, aided by many willing hands, was about to throw "Fatty" out of the stockholders' meeting when suddenly there was an ominous thumping upon the floor overhead, indicating wrath on the part of the Wilson family, which was still trying to live there.

"Hey! sit down everybody and keep still!" said

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the worried chairman. "It's all right; Ranny can be treasury. I don't care."

Feeling that he had given a generous two cents' worth of loyalty, "Fatty" now subsided, and Ranny relieved everybody of his small change. Tug Wiltshire was elected secretary because of his knowledge of the trade, and at Ranny's demand "Fatty" was chosen doorkeeper and custodian of the peace. Putting the peace in "Fatty's" care proved to be equivalent to a motion to adjourn. In a sort of informal inaugural address he declared that if Ted Blake, or anybody like that, made any noise he would be thrown out. In the eruption that followed Mrs. Wilson came down the inside cellar steps and dissolved the meeting *sine die*.

"Nex' Satu'day," Ranny announced, "we can meet in our woodshed an' make a store for our stamps. We can holler there an' ever'thing."

To "The Lakeville Stamp Company"—the name sprouted in Tug Wiltshire's fertile brain—"holler-ing" rights were extremely precious, so it was agreed that the next meeting would be held at the home of the treasury. Presently the officers met and invested the capital; this was arranged amicably and without any quarrels whatever, except two.

Early in the following week Ranny was approached by Clarence Raleigh, who had thus far taken no part in the stamp industry.

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"Let me be in your company," said this gilded youth. "I can get lots of money. My father—"

"I tell you what," Ranny interrupted so as to be spared the painful details. Nobody would thank him for taking Clarence into the company, but, on the other hand, Raleigh money was undoubtedly genuine. "You come 'round to my house nex' Satu'day mornin' an' bring a lot of money. We're goin' to have some fine stamps to sell."

"Well, maybe," said Clarence, doubtfully.

"Don't tell anybody I told you. It's a kind of a secret we got—me an' you."

"Well, all right," Clarence replied, obviously pleased by this token of intimacy.

Although excessively popular with his mother and father, Clarence had never made headway with the younger and rougher set. Ranny's was a reflex, defensive action based upon a desire not to be associated with this overdressed youth in the public mind. Its only penalty was that throughout a week of broad commercial affairs, with incidental school work, he had to exchange winks of guilty knowledge with Clarence Raleigh.

The days were crowded with details—visiting the post-office with Tug until the parcel of stamps finally arrived, turning them over, with protests, to the president, and discussing what each shareholder would do with his profits. Ranny had men-

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tally spent his dividends over and over for various goods, but toward the end of the week he settled down to spending them for a sled. His former sled had collapsed beyond repair; cold weather was coming on and the first snowstorm would find him utterly unprepared. On Saturday morning Ranny's modest hope was that he could realize one dollar and thirty-seven cents before the day was over; a small but yellow sled was held at that price in the basement of the Star Department Store.

At the meeting, which opened shortly after breakfast, Ranny's invitation to "holler an' ever'thing" was accepted almost too literally. For its size it was probably the loudest stockholders' meeting ever held in Lakeville. The only business was to set out the stock in a way supposed to be tempting to people of means. This had to be done without the authoritative hand of Tug Wiltshire, who, for some reason, was not present at the meeting.

The display was made upon the counter which Ranny had hitherto devoted to the sale of medicine. With stamps upon the counter, lithographic art upon the walls, the rattly bones of the old sled hanging upon a nail, and, further to delight the eye, a pile of stove wood, a bag of walnuts, a hoop, a dismantled clock, one stilt, and a cage of guinea-pigs, Ranny's shop seemed to illustrate the modern tendency of

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drug-stores to sell everything with the possible exception of drugs.

For a while philately absorbed what little attention there was; it was clearly the finest aggregation of second-hand stamps ever collected under one roof. True, there was a rather too generous supply of such old friends as "twenty-cent Dutchlands" and "ten-cent Nederlands," but there were also rarer birds. Borneo was represented, and a country called Norge, also several South American republics with stamps of immense denominations. The Straits Settlements rubbed elbows with Helgoland—where "Fat-ty" Hartman had no friends. Here were arrayed the solemn visages of half the world's potentates, pleasantly relieved by kangaroos and dragons and Egyptian pyramids. The exhibition would have coaxed money out of any pocket which contained any.

There, alas, lay the difficulty. The stockholders had already strained their resources; they were here, not to buy, but to "holler" and collect dividends. "The Lakeville Stamp Company" had no intention of prospering by selling things to itself; it counted upon a trusting, solvent public. Therefore the corporate name was chalked upon the fence where the alley joined the street and an arrow pointed the way to the open back-yard gate. Once arrived at the woodshed, the customer had only to overpower Doorkeeper Hartman and wade through cheering

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stockholders to his heart's desire. But though an hour had passed since business opened, the only person who had come near was a penniless "Frogtown" youth who had inserted his moon-shaped face into the alley window and inquired, "What's ever'body a-hollerin' f'r?" The pocket of Randolph Harrington Dukes was still innocent of all treasure except his own Saturday-morning dime.

Ted Blake was the first to lose faith in the enterprise. "This ain't no good," he said. "Gimme back my two cents. I don't wanta belong to this here company any more."

"You *gotta* belong," Ranny replied. "The treasury's got no regalar money—only stamps."

Simultaneously patience ceased to be a virtue with three other stockholders, besides "Fatty," who, being a pauper, had no standing in the courts. The defection was rapidly approaching financial panic. Ranny, in desperation, was about to risk ridicule and disclose his secret information about possible orders when he was struck with a finer and nobler idea. It had an element of speculation because Clarence Raleigh, owing to his mother's veto power, was undependable in his engagements, but it held glittering possibilities, including a yellow sled.

"I tell you," he said, "le's don't organize a company any more. I'll take all the stamps for my store."

Through the cries of rage the idea finally per-

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colated that Ranny was proposing to buy, not to steal, the company's assets. He escaped to the house and by patient probing withdrew from his iron savings-bank its entire seven cents. Furthermore, he suggested to Mother that she pay him his next week's wages in advance.

"My goodness! what a racket they're making!" was Mother's irrelevant comment.

"If I had another ten cents," Ranny replied, "mebbe I could make 'em go 'way."

Perhaps this possibility struck Mother as a good bargain; at any rate, Ranny soon rejoined his business associates jingling with copper.

"They ain't enough money to pay ever'body back," said Ranny. This announcement had a further depressing effect upon the market, and in the slump Ranny began to buy.

Ted Blake relinquished his claim for one cent in cash and a handful of walnuts; Tom Rucker sold his birthright for a slightly bent jews'-harp and promptly began to render selections. Cash, stamps, and walnuts in various combinations secured the release of all the minor claims against the company. Books had been kept in the heads of the stockholders, and adjustments were made by disputation and personal abuse. In the half-hour while the company was being unorganized Ranny's mother did not get even three cents' worth of silence.

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Arthur Wilson, who was sunk in "Lakeville Stamp" to the depth of a quarter, proved hard to buy off. Ranny offered him stamps, also a guinea-pig; but it seemed that the only thing the outgoing president desired less than stamps was live stock. Ranny called attention to the sled and the clock, but Arthur had no taste for antiques. The final settlement involved a small and reluctant guinea-pig, four cents in cash (all that remained in the treasury), and a ruinous helping of walnuts. In return Arthur gave up his official title, also a special revenue stamp which he had found in the bank cellar and which thus far had proved unique.

"Fatty" Hartman now came forward demanding to be liquidated.

"I lent you the money," said Ranny, earnestly. "I don't owe you nothing an' you don't owe me nothing. Ever'thing's all right."

But everything, it appeared, was *not* all right. Walnuts were being cracked all over the floor of the stamp exchange and nobody gave "Fatty" any walnuts. He threatened Ranny with dire organization if something was not done for his sad case.

Tom Rucker interrupted a rendition of "In the Sweet By and By" to emit humor.

"You're the doorkeeper," he said. "Put yourself out."

"Fatty" caught the subtle spirit of the whimsy

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and grabbed himself by the collar. Before an appreciative audience he staged a contest between the official and private sides of his nature.

Into this orgy of feasting, music, and high carnival there now entered the most innocent of all possible investors. Though the weather was mild, Clarence's form was draped in a gray overcoat of distinctive pattern. His felt hat was encircled by a daring ribbon of robin's-egg blue. Yet—so great is the power of the dollar—Ranny was actually glad to see him.

"Fatty" gave up the struggle with his lawless private self and started to put Clarence out, as against public policy.

"Leave 'im alone!" shouted Ranny. "Mebbe he's a cus-customer." He spread out his hands on the counter as one who strives to please. "What 'll it be to-day?" he asked.

"Look what I got this morning," Clarence replied. He drew from under his coat a book of about the size of an advanced geography.

"The Young Philadelphia," read out "Fatty," ignorantly. "Wha's *that* f'r?"

"That word is *philatelist*," said Clarence. "It's a stamp album. My father got it in Chicago. It cost more than two dollars and a half."

"Well," said Ranny, gleefully, "I s'pose you wanta buy some stamps to put in it."

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Clarence opened *The Young Philatelist* with a gloved hand. "Yes," he said, sneeringly, "I want to buy some stamps like fun!" He dramatically turned over several pages. "It's got them all in already—every stamp in the world!"

Ranny saw with dismay that the pages were filled with stamps. Mr. Raleigh, with characteristic thoughtfulness, had bought a ready-made collection so as to save his son from mental wear and tear. Ranny was angry at the way he had been duped.

"You hav'n't, *either*, got all the stamps in the world. I betcha you hav'n't even got that one." He picked up the portrait of a handsome pink kangaroo.

"What country?" asked the young philatelist.

"Austria."

"Australia," corrected Arthur Wilson.

"Well, Australia, then," said Ranny. "Same thing."

Clarence found the place and not only duplicated the pink kangaroo, but showed other kangaroos in assorted colors. A similar fate befell the pyramid. Even Ranny's personal Chinese dragon, acquired at the risk of life and limb, was represented in this masterpiece of philately.

"I guess," said the desperate storekeeper, "your ol' book hasn't got this." It was the special revenue stamp which he had acquired in trade.

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Clarence did not have such a stamp, but he had something just as good—a perfect defense.

“That isn’t a regular stamp,” he said. “I wouldn’t have a stamp like that. My father could buy me—”

“Who wants your of stamps, anyhow?” said Ted Blake. “Stamps ain’t no good. Le’s go out an’ play shinny.”

It was a minute before Ranny realized the extent of his misfortune. The bottom had dropped out of the market; it was Black Saturday on the stamp exchange. Any game in which Clarence Raleigh could achieve perfection became automatically not worth the candle. Several former stamp-collectors went so far as to toss insulting Dutchlands and Nederlands upon the counter. The fickle population laughed at Ranny’s folly and trooped out in quest of shinny.

Ranny sat alone in the great silence; he had no heart for pounding a tin can with a stick. He stayed in the woodshed because he could pity himself there better than in the open air. His walnut-bag was depleted, his cash reserves gone, his future mortgaged for a week—and Tug Wiltshire still held an eight-cent claim against the company. He was out a guinea-pig and a jews’-harp and winter was coming on. All he had was a lot of stamps, and to try to sell a stamp in the

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present state of the public mind was to invite assault and battery.

Presently, as if his troubles were not already greater than he could bear, his door was darkened by the person whom he least desired to see, that outstanding creditor and secretary, Tug Wiltshire. Tug would be wanting cash and there was no cash. But since it is better to accuse than to be accused, Ranny demanded:

"Why didn't you come to the meeting? It's all over. Ever'body's gone away."

"I got a new book," the east-warder explained. "I had to finish it first. It's all about a boy that had a aeroplane. The boy—"

"Did you come straight here after you got done?"

"Yes. The boy went—"

"Did you see any of the kids?"

"No."

Ranny began to feel that life still held some interesting possibilities.

"I bet you don't know what happened—I bought the stamp company." He explained how he had satisfied all claims, but made no mention of the depressing Clarence Raleigh. If Tug *would* sit in the east ward and read books, let him take the consequences.

"What 're you goin' to do with all them stamps?"

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Ranny lovingly fondled a few of his brightest animals and kings.

"I'm goin' to sell 'em." Then, as if stricken with a fresh idea: "What 'll you give me for the whole bunch? My own stamps, too. An' this here—now—you know—special rev'nue."

Tug examined the special revenue, then, constant reader that he was, peeped into a paper-covered booklet of some sort.

"I hav'n't got any money, hardly," he said. "I'll give you—I tell you, I'll trade you that there book. The boy went up—"

"No, I don't want no book." Ranny felt that literature was poor equipment for a hard, cold winter. "Have you got a sled?"

"Yes." Tug brightened perceptibly. "I'll give you my sled. It's a good sled—not all busted like that one." He indicated the venerable relic upon the wall.

"Well, all right." Ranny tried to restrain the feverish joy in his voice. "Take 'em an' I'll come an' get the sled."

As he helped gather up the stamps he conceived a bold plan by which he could punish Tug for starting this ridiculous stamp business and at the same time win his own way back into popular esteem.

"The kids are playin' shinny," he said. "Why don't you go an' sell 'em some stamps? They all

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got money—'cept 'Fatty,' of course." He pictured the joyful and violent scene when Tug tried to sell stamps to those hardened shinny-players, and then and there resolved to be present.

"No," said Tug. "I can't now. I gotta go home an' send something to the stamp company. That special revenue is worth a dollar an' a half."

VI

A FUGITIVE FROM INJUSTICE

WITH one possible exception a boy's best friend is his cap. Whereas a hat is a mere article of clothing, a cloth cap ministers to the higher needs of the human soul. Applied locally it covers deficiencies in hair-combing; turned inside out it is a disguise; games are built upon it; without it the great outdoor sport of standing upon the head would lose its subtle charm. In response to the various demands of a complex life it is a towel, an eraser, a fruit-basket, a shoe-brush, a pen-wiper, a butterfly-net, and a home plate. It can be ridiculed, pushed over the eyes, or pulled over the ears. Also, as Randolph Harrington Dukes discovered on the Tuesday following the collapse of the stamp industry, it can be snatched off and thrown over a circus billboard into a difficult back yard.

For some time Ranny's mother had been declaring that this cap, with its rich, earthy tones and its ragged lining, was an offense to the eye. It is possible that its loss would have been hailed at home

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as a sanitary triumph. But Ranny, who did not share these views, found himself a Richard without a horse, a Samson shorn of his locks.

The author of the atrocity was Ted Blake, an untamed spirit who fitted poorly into modern civilization.

"Hey! wha's the matter with you?" Ranny demanded of the culprit. "Now you gotta climb over and get my cap back!"

This was the one wrong thing to say. Approached on the softer side of his nature or "ban'ered" or bet a million dollars, Ted would have made the ascent with ease instead of replying:

"Well, why don't ya make me?"

It is almost impossible to force a fellow-citizen to climb over a billboard against his better judgment. Bud Hicks, who was for the moment on hostile terms with Ted, had just offered to boost Ranny when suddenly the cap came sailing back over the fence and fell among the astonished youth. Ranny picked the thing up and examined the blue sky for clues.

"Who slung that?" he cried out.

Ted, who could not have been forced to mount the billboard, took a running leap, grabbed the top with his hands, and, after kicking the remnants of a lithographic ringmaster for a time, succeeded in drawing himself up high enough to be struck in the ear by an old shoe. Ted spent such a short time

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up there that his observations were of no scientific value. Tom Rucker got himself boosted into the line of fire with much the same result. Meanwhile "Fatty" Hartman had found a knot-hole in the billboard just east of the clown.

"Oh, lookee!" he said, permitting nobody to do so. "Who's that kid in there? I never seen him before. What's *he* doin' in this town?"

One might have judged, from his aggrieved tone, that all strangers were compelled by law to register with "Fatty" and state their intentions. He continued giving out bulletins: "Looks like a tough kid. I bet he come from Chicago."

"Aw, give somebody else a chanst, can't ya?" demanded Ted, pulling "Fatty" away from the hole.

Ranny, knowing that he came under the head of somebody else, jumped in and got a fine, brief view of a back yard and dump-heap, but he saw no human soul, tough or otherwise. Yet the very next person to climb the fence was struck in the old familiar way. It was clear that the unknown had some sort of hiding-place from which he could emerge to throw refuse at the native sons.

Ranny, who was himself again with the return of the cap, proposed strategy. Those present were divided into climbers and boosters; even a tough Chicagoan cannot hit four or five persons at once.

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The boosters would then boost each other until the supply was exhausted.

"How'll *I* git in?" asked "Fatty," who was marked by nature to be a booster rather than a climber.

"You stay here," replied Ted, "an' ketch 'im if he climbs over an' tries to git away."

"I can't hang around here all night," said "Fatty," who did not relish a single-handed encounter with a product of the slums. "I gotta go home an' fix the hen-house."

But civilization had no time for "Fatty's" private griefs, and the scaling of the wall began. The invasion was successful enough from a military point of view, but, as so often happens in history, the conquerors fell victims to the conquered. Curiosity and admiration held them spellbound in a wide, staring circle. This youth was of a proper and interesting size; he was dark both naturally and by accretion, his hair was longer than parents usually permit, and his clothes showed no traces of a mother's interfering hand. Most wonderful of all, the boy lived in a box, there in the back yard of Jimmy Garvin's flour-and-feed store. He did not live excessively, perhaps, but he had a mattress of sorts, and something in the way of covers.

"I bet you come from Chicago," said Ted Blake, not unamiably.

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To "Fatty" a this private knot-hole this must have seemed rank plagiarism.

"Well, who said I didn't?" were the stranger's first words to the welcoming committee.

"What's your name?" asked Tom Rucker.

"Puddin' Tame." There was no point in pursuing this line of inquiry, for it always came out the same way. Presently Jimmy Garvin, flour and feed, came to the rear doorway and called out in his funny, cracked voice:

"Run along now, boys. My friend don't want to be bothered."

"Goo'-by, 'Chicago,'" Ranny said, in parting. "You slung back my cap."

"Chicago" cleared himself of the charge of soft politeness.

"I didn't want anybody foolin' around here," he said, sullenly.

Conversation ran high as the boys pursued their gradual homeward way. "The kid is awful tough," that was universally admitted; but Ted Blake, a student of crime and owner of a haymow library, went further. It was Ted's suspicion that "Chicago" was "wanted" by the police of practically all the large cities of the United States and Canada.

"An' Mexico," said Ranny, helpfully.

"An' Manchester," added Tom Rucker, to whom no subject was sacred.

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"They can all have him," announced "Fatty," who had thought better of fixing the hen-house. "I don't want him."

Since the boy was a fugitive from adult justice, it was thought only right that his presence in Lakeville should be kept a secret. This would have been easier had not "Chicago" appeared next day upon the street, openly driving Jimmy Garvin's delivery horse. The vehicle was old and complaining, its wheels leaned inward or outward according to no settled plan, and the horse was no credit to Jimmy Garvin's wares. A criminal could not have eluded the police force of even a medium-sized city by the aid of this ambitionless horse. But the outfit was adequate to Jimmy's slight needs. Jimmy was a "character" and was liked as such in the business district, but most people bought their supplies for man and beast elsewhere. In fact, the news that Jimmy had taken an assistant produced laughter wherever two or three were gathered together.

Almost overnight the flour-and-feed store became the social center of young Lakeville. From the adjournment of school in the afternoon until supper was impending the shop was filled with a lively and unprofitable crowd. A stranger might have thought that the consumption of flour and feed by Lakeville boys was appalling. Jimmy Garvin was delighted with the success of his *salon*. He was about ninety

JIMMY GARVIN WAS ABOUT NINETY PER CENT. BOY, WITH LITTLE TASTE FOR BUSINESS



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per cent. permanent boy, with little taste for business; dominoes and checkers responded to a vital need of his nature.

For some days the adult world was but dimly aware of the new social force, though mothers wondered at the gray and dusty character of their sons' clothing. They did not know that the younger set had taken to burrowing in bins of bran and burying one another in wheat destined for chicken-feed.

Jimmy Garvin, checkers, and wheat-bins were splendid entertainments, but from the first the magnet was "Chicago"—he never admitted the possession of a real name. He was a fountainhead of interest and wickedness, his conversation was replete with "darns" and "doggoness." The home talent made no effort to conceal their faith in his essential toughness. When the first natural antagonism between outsider and old settlers had broken down, "Chicago" seemed anxious to please. For the ordinary uses of life he had rather a charming social manner, including a talented way of flapping his hands open and shut when he played the harmonica. But when accused of toughness he clouded up and gave the public what it wanted. Asked for reminiscences of his spicy life in the great crime centers, he responded in a vague but generous way. Ted Blake, who was constantly seeking confirmation of

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his theories, got everything he wanted except mere information.

"Listen here," Ted said one day, as all the best people were carving their initials upon the kennel-like home, "if you walked right down the street in Chicago in the daytime—jus' like you are—whaja s'pose would happen?"

The criminal took on that offensive manner that had so endeared him to the young.

"Whadda *you* know about Chicago?" he demanded. "I guess you don't know a doggone thing. I wouldn't git three doggone blocks!"

Ted was delighted. "How 'bout St. Louis and Oregon and all them places?"

The metropolitan turned from this ignorant provincial in despair. "The kid thinks the p'lice don't know nothin'. What am I foolin' around this darn little town for? Answer me that!"

Nobody answered him that, because to repeated requests for enlightenment as to how and why he came to Lakeville he had made no reply. Jimmy Garvin himself claimed not to know anything when interviewed by Jasper Wakefield, truant officer.

The truant officer was the serpent which menaced this flour-and-feed paradise. "Chicago" was obviously not over ten, and a captious person might have thought that his education was incomplete. But Wakefield held his position more by virtue of

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his sane views upon the tariff than because of his passion for learning. He inclined toward personal liberty and preferred not to exert himself in any matter until urged in influential quarters. Somehow those parents who had seen Garvin's new assistant going about his duties had not arisen as one parent to force the stranger to associate with their children in the halls of learning. So a week had passed since the discovery of "Chicago," and his life was still one glad, sweet Saturday.

It was understood that the globe-trotter was to spend the winter in Lakeville safe from the minions of the law, but that he was presently to abandon his summer home in the back yard and move about twenty feet nearer Jimmy Garvin's stove. As the days went on, his personal appearance did not improve or his popularity wane. Jimmy was an indulgent foster-parent in matters of washing and combing, and there was ill-concealed envy among the unfortunates who had to live in houses and hobnob with parents.

At times favored persons were allowed to ride about with the young driver upon his deliveries—Jimmy's outfit was a splendid system of transportation for one whose time was one's own. Whoever bought a bag of "middlins" or "shorts" in those days might expect to have it delivered with cheers. As many as six boys sometimes participated in carrying in a

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single bag of feed. Frequently "Chicago" made an entire trip without being called upon to do any work except mental.

Jimmy Garvin's staff of ungentlemanly assistants loved their work so much that they hailed with delight each new possibility for one of these seeing-Lakeville tours. When old Mr. Jennings, who lived across the street from the Dukes family, came into Garvin's to buy something to keep together the body and soul of his sorrel horse, Nelly, he met with a surprising ovation.

"Them boys 'll drive me crazy," said Jimmy, unconvincingly. "They are regalar cautions!"

Mr. Jennings might have suggested ways to rid a store of cautions, but he adopted an even less desirable course; he waylaid Ranny's father that evening and had speech with him.

"What's this I hear about your hanging around Garvin's feed-store?" Father asked at the supper-table. "What do you do there?"

"Oh, nuthin'," said Ranny, uneasily. "Jus' have a little fun."

Mother seemed to see a great light. "Well—I—wondered," she said. "You've nearly ruined that good school suit."

Ranny looked himself over, but failed to see anything amiss with his clothes. Of course he had never set himself up for a dandy.

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"I don't think," Father went on, "that you ought to spend so much time with that strange boy."

Ranny tried to think of something that would recommend "Chicago" in home circles, his mind automatically rejecting such virtues as familiarity with the police. He had to fall back upon philanthropy. "The poor fella's got no father an' mother," he said.

"Who is this boy, anyway?" asked Mother, with some concern. "I haven't seen him."

"Looks like a slum boy," said Father. "He's what you might call the offscouring of our great cities."

Mother was able, while shopping the next forenoon, to get a private view of the offscouring of our great cities. From her report at noon Ranny judged that Mother's visit had been ill-timed. At an hour when other youth were fitting themselves for a finer and nobler future, "Chicago," it seems, was in front of his place of business, standing upon one hand for the entertainment of Sim Coley, the janitor of the hose-house. It is unfair to judge a stranger by his appearance when upside down, or to blame him for the poor reputation of bystanders. But the parental mind closes up tight at the approach of anything in the least unusual. As a result, Ranny was forbidden henceforth to attend Jimmy Garvin's farinaceous *salon*.

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Ranny always obeyed such decrees literally, laying down as he went highly technical rules for his own guidance. For the case in hand he decided that Jimmy's domain ended at the front door of his shop. Since "Chicago" interpreted his duties as clerk with great breadth and gave himself free range of the business district, Ranny was able to enjoy, quite lawfully, some delightful odds and ends of the criminal's society.

But the arrangement was far from satisfactory, for untactful people like Ted Blake became arrogant about their superior privileges. On the day after the new law went into effect, "Chicago," ably assisted, was doing his clerking at the town pump. The slum boy was luring thirsty mouths to the spout with specious promises to pump easy. There had already been two mild cases of strangulation and a pleasant time was being had by all when Ted made a proposal that ruined everything.

"Le's go to the store," he said, "an' chew some wheat."

Now wheat-chewing was a purely social vice. Groups of chewers pretended to esteem it highly, but nobody chewed wheat except in the place provided by the management.

"Aw, come on an' have some fun," Ranny protested. "Wheat ain't chewin'-gum."

Ranny had truth on his side, but public opinion

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was with Ted. Ranny therefore parted with his fellows at the door of Garvin's wheat-chewing den and took his troubled mind home. As a reward for his obedience he was requested to "mind the baby."

In that hour of discontent Ranny found his baby sister faulty as a fireside companion. Time would cure her of being a baby (as it had cured him), but she would never get over being a sister. She had no accomplishments, she knew nothing of life or crime. How different things would be if there were a person like "Chicago" in the house, sharing one's bed and board. If he could only induce his parents to open their doors to the stranger within Lakeville's gates, he would have exclusive rights to "Chicago's" society in perpetuity against a world of envious Ted Blakes.

"Chicago," laundered and tailored, might lose something of his value as scenery, but he would always have his past. A past cannot be washed and combed away. And perhaps at night, in the darkness of the bedroom, when parents fondly supposed that they were deep in innocent sleep, "Chicago" would reel out agitating tales.

With Ranny, to hope was to plan. He promptly evolved a scheme for bringing his parents and his friend together. In pursuance of the open-door policy he isolated his victim late the next afternoon,

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"Hey, 'Chicago,'" he said, "come on down to my house a minute. I got sumpin' to show you."

This was at the twilight zone of Garvin's dominions, and the other roisterers were at the moment inside. As the fugitive from injustice always had his hat on, except possibly when he was asleep, he was able to depart without saying anything to his employer. At home Ranny introduced his guest to the mysteries of the woodshed and the drug-store.

"This is the secrut den," he explained. "A person could hide here fine if anybody was a-lookin' for them."

This pointed remark arrested the visitor's attention. They sold drugs unrestrainedly to each other for a time and the new-comer was taken into the firm. The autumn light was failing, and from the kitchen there came odors as of prospective supper.

Knowing that Jimmy Garvin did not furnish his guest with anything elaborate in the way of eating, Ranny drew his companion well into the zone of fragrance. He needed every aid in his delicate social task of bringing together a reluctant guest and an unwilling hostess.

The two youths sat upon the edge of the back porch in the deepening dusk and did as near nothing as practicable. In the Indian-summer weather the kitchen door stood open because of the smoke incident

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to broiling steak. An analytical nose might also have detected the presence of rapidly crisping potatoes. An oven door was heard to open and shut and shortly the atmosphere was enriched by the odor of biscuits approaching maturity. The three elements combined to form a dangerous gas which paralyzed the will-power, with symptoms of mouth-watering.

"Oo, that smells good!" exclaimed Ranny, mercifully.

"I gotta go now," replied "Chicago," gruffly, but he did not do so.

Presently there were noises indoors indicating that Father had come home for supper. And soon Mother appeared at the open door.

"Come in now, Ranny," she said.

Ranny arose nervously, "Chicago" with some difficulty. Ranny scratched his knee in pure embarrassment. His plan had reached its crucial moment. Mother seemed to be battling with conflicting emotions; "Chicago" stood irresolute, suspended between personal liberty and home cooking. In the tricky light from the kitchen he looked less like the offscouring of our great cities than like a hungry little boy.

"Won't you come in and have supper with Ranny?" It had come at last! What Mother's words lacked in enthusiasm, Ranny—and the

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poisonous gases—supplied. The slum boy surrendered without firing a shot.

“Let your friend wash first,” said the hostess, with rare tact.

Privately to his guest Ranny said, “I gotta wash every night—neck an’ ever’thing.” This was at once an apology and a suggestion.

The vagabond, scrubbed and combed, presented rather an elegant appearance. His long wet black hair was plastered down tight, although as time passed over his head little clumps arose here and there like second-growth timber. His clothes had apparently left buttons in all our principal cities, but when he was once seated at the supper-table this defect was not so noticeable. The real trouble was yet to develop; “Chicago” did not shine brightly in conversation. With supper well advanced, he had made but one remark, and that not notably brilliant. In reply to Father’s query as to whether he would have more biscuits he said, “Yes, ma’am.”

The only thing that could be said for this statement was that it was true; the boy did have more biscuits as well as everything else that was suggested. He ate in an efficient and workman-like fashion; he ate as if he had not seen solid food since the police had chased him out of St. Louis and Oregon. The conversational deadlock was broken by Father.

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"Will you have some more steak?" he asked. "You, I mean. I'm afraid I don't know your name."

The visitor bore the look of one whose worst fears have been realized. His host had put the thing in such a way that he had to tell his name in order to get the alluring morsel upon the carving-fork. For the second time his desires got the better of his reason.

"My name is Roy," he said, faintly.

"Oh yes, Roy," said Father, fulfilling his part of the implied bargain.

"That's a nice name," Mother added.

It was a nice enough name for domestic use, Ranny thought, but vastly inferior to those conjured up by Ted out of his wide reading. "Mexico Mike" was among the mildest of these.

"I understand you come from Chicago," said Father. "Where did you live there?"

Roy fixed his gaze upon his devastated plate and addressed it confidentially, "State Street."

"That so? Where on State Street?"

The boy was evidently ashamed of the neighborhood, for he answered, with great reluctance, "By Michigan Boulevard."

"How things change in these big cities," Father said, with a shake of the head. "When I was in Chicago only two or three months ago State Street

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and Michigan Boulevard didn't come near each other."

For some reason the conversation died here, just when things were getting sociable. Father and Mother exchanged cryptic looks, and there were no further excursions into Roy's past.

When supper was over Father turned to Ranny and said: "You run along now and help Mother clear up. Roy and I are going to have a little talk."

Ranny was so happy at this news that he was prepared to endure both separation and dish-wiping. Things were coming splendidly. Father, too, had discovered that "Chicago's" place was in the home. At this very moment Father was probably pleading with him to come and be a brother to Ranny. The alliteration was a happy discovery; "Ranny and Roy" would look fine in the drug business.

Mother kept him longer than usual—at least it seemed longer—but at last he was released and ran into the sitting-room to welcome the new member. He stopped in consternation at the threshold; something had gone sadly wrong. If it had been anybody less tough, one would have said the boy had been crying. His face was streaked as if a coat-sleeve had brushed across a damp surface. Also he was taking deep gasps which are the aftermath of tears.

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"What 'd he do?" asked Ranny, jumping to the conclusion that his guest had been acting up.

"Your friend," said Father, soberly, "has decided that a home is a pretty good place, after all." Ranny's heart gave a joyous leap and turned over twice. "So he is going back to-morrow to Rushton, where he lives." The rest was addressed to Mother, who had just entered the room. "Your cooking seems to have made Roy homesick. He's never been away from his folks before."

Ranny's high hopes, and what little faith in mankind he still had after eight disillusioning years of life, perished at Father's words. The fellow was an impostor. He had never lived in Chicago or sneaked down the back streets of Oregon. He was just an ordinary boy living in a little town not more than eighteen, or maybe fifty, miles away. Probably Lakeville was the largest place he had ever seen!

It was decided that Roy was to spend the night with them—Father said that Sheriff Sembridge had poor accommodations for transients. Father then went down-town to telephone to Roy's home and also to break the news to Jimmy Garvin. Meanwhile the fugitive was very poor company. The idea of a family reunion seemed distasteful to him; he gave Ranny a harrowing account of the chores and school he had to undergo when at home and took the unreasonable view that it was Ranny who was

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responsible for sending him back. More than likely others would take a similar view. As far as he could see, everything was lost, including honor.

At the news that his father would come to-morrow to take him home Roy's face expressed anything but filial delight.

"Don't worry, boy," Father said, "he's glad enough to get you back. He says he thought you had gone to Chicago because you have always been so crazy to see it. He's had the police there looking for you for a week."

There was a grain of comfort in this last piece of news—a grain which presently began to sprout. When an owl hooted in the alley near the woodshed—that is, it was supposed to pass as a hoot among the uninitiated—Ranny went into the back yard and made a sound like a very discreet owl.

"'Sst! Let us in," came Ted Blake's whisper.

Ranny unhooked the gate of the high board fence and six shadowy forms filed into the yard.

"What's ever'body runnin' around for?" asked Ranny. "This ain't Hallowe'en."

"Is anybody a-listenin' here?" asked Ted, dramatically.

"Nope; only me," replied Ranny.

"Chicago's run away." This unauthorized version came from the amplest of the shadowy forms.

"Shut up, 'Fatty,'" said Ted, whose climax had

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thus been spoiled. "Ya want everybody in town to know it?"

"Jimmy Garvin don't know where he is." This was in Tom Rucker's voice.

Ted gave up all idea of preserving discipline. "We're out a-huntin' 'im," he said.

Now that his eyes had become accustomed to the light, Ranny saw that all parties were in disguise—that is, their caps were wrong side out. Simultaneously he realized that, whatever the morrow might bring, the present moment was rich with possibilities.

"If I tell you sumpin'," he said, "will you keep it secret?"

The conspirators gathered close and pledged eternal silence.

"I got 'im safe. He's goin' away to-morrow with—a fella he knows."

"Where's he goin'?" Ted Blake had lost his mantle of arrogance.

"It's all right where he's goin'," Ranny replied. "Mebbe I'll tell you some day. His real name, too."

There was a moment of flattering silence. Ranny utilized the time well—for creative work never came easy to him.

"Listen here," he said. "Ever'body do what I tell you an' they won't be no trouble. Don't let anybody see you leavin' here, the sheriff or anybody like that. Go back through the alley"—the idea

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was getting bigger and bigger—"one at a time. Don't go near no 'lectric lights or anything like that. You go first, 'Fatty.' If you get away safe, hoot like a owl."

"I'm a rotten hooter," "Fatty" objected. "Let Ted go first."

"I like it here all right," said Ted.

"You wouldn't like it here all right if you knew what I know." With these words Ranny opened the back-yard gate about an inch, listened intently, then closed it again. "The Chicago police," he whispered, "have been lookin' for 'im for a week!"

VII

DIVIDING UP

MRS. LEONARD'S confectionery, toy, and notion store (commodities named in the order of their importance) was a puzzling phenomenon. It was not "down-town," like a regular store, but right among the residences; in fact, Mrs. Leonard herself lived in a house adjoining the little frame building and connected with it at the rear. It was the kind of shop people's mothers told them to "run over to" and get a spool of thread or a paper of pins or rubbers for the Mason jars. Its single show-window, rightly considered, was a clock that told the time of year. In February it put forth valentines—pretty ones that girls affected, and delicious, funny, ugly ones to settle old scores and start new ones. As soon as the snow disappeared jackstones and marbles and baseballs bloomed in this sunny, sheltered place, and, almost before one knew it, a flannel rabbit and colored eggs (the same rabbit every year, but different eggs). On some bright morning in June as a person was walking

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along, thinking of something else entirely, he suddenly discovered that Mrs. Leonard's window was riotously unsafe and insane with red firecrackers, Roman candles, and boxes containing a few torpedoes and a great deal of sawdust. At this period mothers always looked worried, and said, "Oh my gracious, it's coming again!"

Passing quickly over the drab days of school tablets and pencil-boxes, one existed somehow until a certain fair, crisp afternoon in early December, when the window was a promised land of sweetness and wonder. There was candy in infinite variety and inconceivable quantity—trays of chocolates and cocoanut, peanut bars, gum-drops glistening with sugar, striped sticks in glass jars, red drops, beans surpassing anything in nature, licorice, broken taffy, foot-hills of assorted joy circling a mixed-candy mountain of pure delight—or approximately pure. Crabbed age estimated that there was enough stuff in this one window to bring a toothache to every home in Lakeville; but youth gazed gregariously and wished it had a million dollars.

On such a day as this, Randolph Harrington Dukes, with one cheek distended, stood upon the steps of this emporium of delight and contemplated our social and economic system. His deliberate, eight-going-on-nine opinion of it was far from flattering; any one could see that there was no justice

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in the arrangement. In spite of the teacher's frequent assertion that this is a land of equality, it was plain that people were divided into three classes. There were the rich, like Mrs. Leonard, who had more candy than they could eat (even by eating nights), and yet who parted with it only in dribblets and strictly in accordance with the prices marked on little pasteboard tags. There were those who, like Ranny himself, frequently had pennies to spend for all-day suckers, jaw-breakers, chewing-gum, and such durable delights, with occasional five-cent windfalls of soft and expensive confectionery. And then there were the poor who never had candy at all.

It was the spectacle of Mary Murray and her little brother John, standing hungrily before the show-window and typifying grinding poverty, that started all this philosophy. Mary and John lived with shiftless parents (Ranny had "shiftless" on high authority) in the short street between the railroad and the marsh. The real name of this thoroughfare was Water Street, but people always called it "Frogtown," and then, when it was too late, looked cautiously about to see whether anybody was present who lived there. "Frogtown" was a good place to go when parents would not admit that the lake was solid enough to slide on; and one spring of joyful memory the people there had to go to their

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houses in boats. In spite of its aquatic advantages, it was a well-known fact that only the poor lived in "Frogtown"; stylish adults seldom went there except to see somebody about the washing.

Young John, who had been breathing upon the window until the scenery was obscured, turned and observed Ranny's lumpy jaw.

"Gimme candy," he said.

Mary jerked him by the arm because it isn't nice to ask for things, but her shawl fluttered loose and she suddenly seemed cold and unhappy; a hole in her stocking showed her skin all rough and blue.

Ranny shifted his indivisible jaw-breaker to his front teeth and exposed it to the public gaze.

"I only had one cent, honest," he said, slapping flabby pockets with empty hands.

Young John was so disheartened at this report that Ranny was sorry he had not plunged on three-for-a-cent caramels. Charity being out of the question, he went in for uncomplimentary thoughts about the scheme of things. His reflections lasted even longer than the jaw-breaker.

He brought up the subject that evening when he and Father were reading in the sitting-room—that is, Father was reading and Ranny was lying on his stomach within the light circle on the floor, looking at the animal pictures in a book about Henry M.

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Stanley. Mother was indulging her queer taste for mending.

"Father," he asked, as he shifted his weight upon one elbow, "why are some people poor and some rich?"

"That's what *I'd* like to know." Father smiled, but did not remove his eyes from the paper.

"It ain't right," Ranny insisted, "for some folks to have all the candy that way."

At this Father dropped the paper and drew the boy to his side.

"Look here, son, we're not exactly rich, but we have plenty to eat and a comfortable home. And I guess you get all the candy you need. It's bad for the teeth, anyway." Thereupon with true adult logic the manufacturer of sterling farm-wagons reached into his pocket and gave up two cents—as if that small amount would muffle the cry of injustice without hurting the teeth.

Jingling the profits of this otherwise sad misunderstanding, Ranny made a fresh start.

"How does people get rich?"

"If you are honest and work hard and save money some day you will be rich"—here Father faltered (perhaps because of Mother's disconcerting smile) and ended, weakly, "or, anyway, not very poor."

"Does rich people work harder 'n poor?"

"No, no!" said Father, impatiently, and took

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refuge behind his paper and the time-worn pretext, "You'll understand these things better when you are older."

"But remember this, dear," Mother added, "you should always be kind to the poor—and most of all in this Christmas season."

Ranny went back to darkest Africa, but though his eyes were fixed upon a deliciously terrifying gorilla about to eat a tree, his thoughts were upon the queer world close at home. When one has a disappearing father and a mother who is more interested in household matters and the baby than in public affairs one naturally learns to rely much upon personal experience. It was pleasant there before the coal fire; Ranny had two cents in his pocket and a school-free Saturday ahead of him, yet he was not happy; the candyless, shiftless Murrays had settled down in his consciousness and refused to move out. Ranny, who, all unknown to himself, was living a rapid résumé of the history of the race, had arrived on that crisp December afternoon at the era of the social conscience.

Father's talk about working hard and saving money had no bearing upon the present crisis; the Murrays could not be expected to hunger for candy until Ranny had grown rich through frugality. This was a childhood problem and had to be settled by more direct methods. Once, when the boys were

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playing shinny with a tin can, Bud Hicks's mother came out and gave him five warm cookies. It is a well-known law that everything must be divided equally, yet they had to sit on Bud's head and poke him with shinny-sticks before they could make him remember this rule. And then the cookies were practically ruined.

Before Ranny went to sleep that night he had a matured plan. To-morrow he would go to Mrs. Leonard and ask her civilly to do the right thing by the poor. If she refused he would have to take matters into his own hands. Public opinion would back him up; the teacher would probably hear about the affair and commend him openly. "Frogtown" would be contented and happy, except for a toothache here and there. Besides, he would get his share with the rest.

The next morning he started out early so that he might set our economic system to rights and get home in time for dinner. Leaving by the back gate, he carried on his arm a basket which, before it became an instrument of social justice, had been used for bringing in kindlings. For a moment he sought inspiration before the toothsome show-window, then boldly mounted the steps. As he opened the door a bell tinkled faintly somewhere in the rear and presently Mrs. Leonard's ample form appeared through the parted curtains.

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"Was there something this morning, Ranny?" she asked, as she put on her spectacles.

Ranny was fully prepared. "I need lotsa candy to give to the poor."

The shopkeeper looked surprised, but as cheerful as possible—though that was not too cheerful at best, because she had a strange growth under one eye which gave her a perpetually tearful appearance. Ranny had often wondered how anybody who lived adjacent to so much free candy could be so unhappy.

"How much do you want?"

"About a basketful." Ranny rested this receptacle upon the counter.

"Good land, child! How much 've you got to spend?"

"I want it free. Many persons is too poor to buy candy."

"No, Ranny, I can't do that."

"I'll pay ya two cents for mine." As evidence of good faith, Ranny displayed the specie together with some irrelevant pocket fuzz.

"No, I can't afford to give away no candy." With this weak rejoinder, Mrs. Leonard turned to a more promising shopper who had just entered. As Ranny was closing the front door he distinctly heard the words:

"That Dukes boy has the queerest ideas—"

Around the corner, where the little store turned a

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windowless side to Jefferson Street, he collected his scattered moral forces. The first repulse, while disappointing, was not wholly unexpected; nothing in his experience had led him to believe that Mrs. Leonard's heart bled for the poor and shiftless. The next step required strategy. Ranny saw the current customer go away and set himself to wait for another; old Mr. Jennings stopped before the shop window, but he did not go inside. He only shook his head and murmured, "How time flies!"

At last a woman came across the street, wiping her steaming hands upon her apron, and entered the store. This was Ranny's opportunity. By watching through the show-window he contrived to be going in just as this purchaser was coming out—a manœuvre based upon the scientific fact that the bell in the back room jingled just the same no matter which way one was bound; Mrs. Leonard would not be expecting any one. The ruse was entirely successful, and Ranny slipped into the room just in time to see the back curtains fall together, leaving him alone in the candy-store with a kindling-basket and a firm moral purpose.

Without delay he attacked the window—the trays first because they were easy to dump, next the open boxes of caramels, and presently the broken taffy. He was starting to remove the mixed-candy mountain with a scoop thoughtfully provided by the man-

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agement when he discovered the white, flat ends of two noses pressed against the window-glass. Though they were not Murray noses, he threw a benevolent smile in their direction and went on with his work, filling his basket hurriedly and, except for one trifling gum-drop, without loss from personal consumption.

Outside, the disinherited—now numbering two boys and a girl—hailed him hopefully, and with an unnecessary “Come on” the premature Santa Claus started in the direction of “Frogtown.”

There followed the finest example of speedy mobilization that the peaceful community had ever known. By a kind of juvenile wireless telegraphy the glorious news flashed down Jefferson Street that a person of tender years was carrying an open market-basket of assorted sweetmeats. Peaceful pursuits were abandoned; all kindling-splitting instantly ceased, nails were left half-driven, skates half-sharpened, cats scared half to death; bows and arrows dropped from the hands of astonished Indians. In the first block Ranny was the center of noisy curiosity; in the second, the leader of a mob; in the third, the Pied Piper of Lakeville.

“Fatty” Hartman came, dancing ponderously in anticipatory delight. Tom Rucker clambered over a picket fence, exclaiming as he fell:

“Ya know me, Ranny—ya know your uncle.”

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This became a popular slogan, and by the time the social revolutionist reached "Frogtown" he had acquired a prodigious number of uncles—and several aunts.

Ranny had proceeded quietly, answering no questions, recognizing no relationships—a little frightened at the extent of his success, but unalterable in his purpose. In "Frogtown" the uncle supply was greatly increased (for "Frogtown" atoned for the small size of its houses by the large size of its families) and at the center of its short and only street the redistribution of wealth began.

Generous but firm, Ranny restrained a tendency on the part of the Collander boy to grab, and doled out the pieces one at a time.

"Jes' wait a minute, can't you?" he kept shouting above the din. "Ever'body 'll get their share. Girls, too."

For a moment this program went smoothly, but, the news having depopulated the skating-pond, there came boys who were larger and stronger than Ranny and lacking his ideas of equity. These at once began dipping into the source of supply and fighting with one another for favored places. In an instant Ranny became the vortex of a candy riot.

Suddenly, however, all scrambling ceased, and the young Robin Hood, surprised and relieved, was left alone with his somewhat depleted basket. Imme-

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diately the cause of this phenomenon descended upon him, flashing violence from indignant spectacles, and a moment later Mrs. Leonard, with a basket in one capable hand and a tender young ear firmly pinched in the other, was starting back toward her place of business.

It is a regrettable fact that the recipients of sweetness and light deserted Ranny in this extremity; they withdrew to trees and fences and munched sedately. "Fatty" Hartman was suddenly deeply concerned as to whether the ice in the gutter would bear his vast weight. Tom Rucker was cautiously proclaiming himself the uncle of Bud Hicks, who, Bud-like, had fared well in the scramble.

This was disillusioning, but the sharpest serpent's tooth of all was the attitude of the Murrays, the innocent cause of all this anarchy. Mary and John, shiftless as usual, had arrived late at the uprising and found it no place for women and children. As they had not shared in the profits, Mary saw no reason why they should share in the prevailing panic, so they stood stolidly on the sidewalk. As the criminal passed he saw Mary pull her brother back from the contaminating presence and heard her say, "He stold candy!" To this young John, deeply impressed, replied, "Gimme candy," and was duly shaken. Thus the Murrays bit the hand that would have fed them as soon as it had time,



THE RECIPIENTS OF SWEETNESS DESERTED RANNY
IN THIS EXTREMITY

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Mrs. Leonard did not speak during that melancholy journey; but once inside the store, the silence was utterly shattered. Ranny learned that he was a burglar and a dangerous criminal of all kinds, that his parents would have their hearts broken without delay, and that everybody for miles around would be thrown into prison. Also, as if not caring to wait upon the slow processes of justice, Mrs. Leonard administered at once a thorough and workman-like spanking.

The wireless had been busy again, this time attuned to the adult ear. Two neighbor women and the driver for Alleston's grocery-wagon formed a sympathetic audience for Mrs. Leonard's account of the outrage. The delivery-man readily identified Ranny as one of those abandoned characters who are forever stealing rides on the back of his wagon when goodness knew it was hard enough to remember where everything went. One woman made clucking sounds indicating hopeless resignation; the other, absently taking a caramel out of the basket, said, "This is awful"—meaning the situation. Ranny ached to justify himself, but the channels of information were choked, and what little news he did give out was subjected to censorship by Mrs. Leonard.

Her garbled version had for the unfortunate young man only one illuminating point: she had been summoned to the store by the bell which rang as he was

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leaving with his spoils. Thus science, which had been his ally at the beginning, had in the end betrayed him. When the candy magnate discovered what had happened to the show-window you could have knocked her down with a feather; but, as there had been nobody present to perform this service to humanity, she had gone outside to look around.

"It didn't take no detective to find out which way they went," she concluded, modestly. "I never heard such carryings-on in all my born days!"

Throughout this ordeal Ranny could see in the street clumps of ex-uncles with tireless jaws and faces gory with red drops staring at the store and gloating over the lively scenes that were to come. When the door opened to let the delivery-man go back to his nerve-racking task they scattered in all directions, then gradually reassembled. But when Mrs. Leonard, having placed the store in the hands of the candy-eating lady for safe-keeping and secured a bonnet from the house, haled the culprit forth, the rising generation melted into the winter landscape.

To Ranny's relief, Mrs. Leonard did not start in the direction of the jail; at any rate, he was not to be deprived of a last look at the old homestead. With many unnecessary jerks she led him to the side door of the Dukes residence and delivered him over to

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Mother, who was at first surprised and then frightened. Mrs. Leonard proceeded to put him in the worst possible light, but presently showed signs of departure.

"I 'ain't got no call to do it, Mis' Dukes," she declared. "He's a bad boy and I ought to have the law on him. But you been a good customer to me, Mis' Dukes, and I don't cherish no malice."

"I'm very, very sorry," Mother said, as she showed her visitor out. "Mr. Dukes will come and repay you for what was taken."

"Well, of course a poor widow woman trying to make ends meet can't afford no losses." While making this speech Mrs. Leonard turned her face so as to display the permanent tear-drop.

Thus to her crimes of refusing aid to the needy, of thwarting the ends of justice, and of misrepresenting the motives of high-minded people, the opulent Mrs. Leonard added that of hypocrisy.

Ranny was just beginning to realize that he was not to be taken at once to a felon's cell when he received a shock that transcended anything in his experience. Mother turned from the closed door, took a step toward him, and burst into tears.

"Oh, Ranny! Ranny!" she sobbed, falling on her knees before him and clasping him convulsively. "I thought you were such a *good* boy. I would never have believed that you would *steal*!"

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"I didn't steal it," he said, huskily. "I took it to give to poor boys and girls."

"Didn't you eat any yourself?" Mother's glistening eyes were looking deep into his.

"Only a l-little," he replied, miserably. And so they cried together.

"All right, dear," Mother said at last. "Run out in the back yard and don't go away. We shall talk to Father about it when he comes to dinner." With a final heart-straining kiss Ranny was dismissed.

It was a relief to be out in the bright sunshine, though his throat ached and the "secret den" in the woodshed refused to lend itself to illusion and become a post-office or drug-store. But as Ranny's temperament was equipped with an automatic stabilizer, he soon began to feel a normal curiosity about the hideous and interesting uproar out in the alley. What he saw, through a loose board in the fence, convinced him that Mother was right: it was best to stick to the back yard.

Tom Rucker, smacking his lips over some imaginary delicacy, was being overwhelmed by superior force (in real life, "Fatty" Hartman) and prodded off to justice with a wagon spoke. Minor offenders were being apprehended all up and down the alley. This spasm of righteousness only ceased at "Colly" Collander's disgusting suggestion that all parties go down-town and look at the jail!

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Considering how many things had happened since breakfast, it was an unbelievably long time until noon, but Father came at last and summoned the culprit to the dining-room to justice.

"Randolph," he asked, in his Supreme Court tones, "is it true that you stole candy from Mrs. Leonard?"

"I t-took the candy," said the accused, avoiding the objectionable verb, "to give to the poor—an' shif'less. Mother *said* we should be kind to the poor."

"Mother never said we should be kind to the poor with other people's property."

"I asked 'er to give me the candy first, but she was too stingy."

Father's face lightened a little. "Mother, did Mrs. Leonard tell you Ranny asked for the candy?"

The witness replied in the negative.

"First I did." Ranny eagerly followed up this advantage. "I told 'er I needed it for the poor. I said I'd pay 'er two cents for mine."

"Wait here a minute." Father took his hat, but not his overcoat, and went out. Not knowing what to make of this new turn of affairs, Ranny looked to Mother for enlightenment, but got no comfort worth mentioning. At the end of a nervous fifteen minutes Father returned, bringing, not the town marshal, but the kindling-basket.

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"Give me fifty cents, Ranny," he said, with startling abruptness. The boy searched his father's face in vain for a smile.

"I 'ain't got fifty cents," he said.

"I paid Mrs. Leonard fifty cents for the candy you gave to the poor and *I want my money back.*" This time Father held out his hand.

Ranny was silent at the thought of that fabulous sum; he realized for the first time the seriousness of his raid.

"I'll—I'll pay over my dish-wipin' money." Ranny looked to Mother for confirmation. "Ten cents every week."

"It will take you five weeks," Father said. "You see it's lots harder to get out of debt than to get in."

Ranny was glad to escape at any price—but not without a final shot at the enemy.

"Mis' Leonard's awful rich an' stingy!"

Thereupon, in a series of astonishing disclosures, it came out that Mrs. Leonard was not a plutocrat at all, but a poor, hard-working widow. Even her little store practically belonged to somebody else. It was like this: Mr. Thompson, who lived in the big house with the steeple and the fountain in the yard, really owned Mrs. Leonard's store because she owed him money. This was called a mortgage. Mr. Thompson also had a mortgage on such things as the

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lumber-yard, and "had a good deal to say in the First National Bank"—a talkative person, evidently, as well as rich.

"He mus' work very hard," said Ranny, remembering the formula.

In the silence which followed Ranny had time to get acquainted with the new idea.

"I tell you," he said at last. "I'm goin' to start a candy-store in the 'secrut den'—just pertend, you know."

"Yes," said Father.

"An' you got a—now—morketch, because I owe you fifty cents."

"Goodness, Mother, I'm a capitalist!" To Ranny Father added: "You better keep a close watch over the stock. There's a great deal of crime in this neighborhood."

"I'll keep 'em out," said Ranny. "I can't afford no losses."

"But the poor," Mother asked; "what about them?"

"If they'd be honest and work hard and save their money," Ranny said, looking down tolerantly upon feminine ignorance of finance, "they wouldn't be so poor. They'd be rich like Father."

At this point the conversation got beyond Ranny's depth.

"I suppose this lesson had to be learned," said

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Mother, thoughtfully, "but it does seem a shame to destroy a generous illusion like that."

"I know," said Father. "Suppose you talk to him some time about the poor and such matters. I seem to be better at making wagons."

VIII

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RANNY struggled desperately, emitted unsuccessful noises, then by a process of twist and upheaval fought his way back to winter daylight. There was snow in the torn lining of his cap, up both sleeves, in the wristbands of both mittens, in the tops of both shoes—but in only one ear. Through the other he heard the derisive shouts of ruffians proceeding on their devastating way. The snow was of the clammy, transitory sort, and had already started a little river down his neck; his arithmetic, when found, was soggy; his ears were hot and his hands cold; and, worst of all, three girls gave him their giggling sympathy. Yet the look that Ranny threw after the sliding, pushing, snowballing scallwags was only one part anger to three parts longing.

All the blowy, January way from the church corner home Ranny ruminated upon the phenomenon of friendship. There might have been one, he thought, in all that barbarian crew to stand up for him and say: “Aw, let ’im alone. Wha’s the matter

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with ya?" and afterward go sliding with him on the hill back of Miller's barn or make a snow-man with a broad grin and a smoke-pipe. There might have been such a person, but there was not—and there never had been. For though Ranny looked upon life with the experienced eyes of eight-going-on-nine, though he had once had his name in the paper and once narrowly escaped going to jail, though he had a velocipede, a drug-store (in season), and five guinea-pigs—not to mention a baby sister—and though he was usually on the best of terms with the juvenile world, he had never had a chum. So far as he knew he had no enemy, and yet, somehow, he had no friend.

People of far fewer attainments often had friends. Ted Blake, who lived in "Frogtown" and whose father was held by adults to be something of a public misfortune, was not without a crony. "Sausage" Buckley and Ted were constantly together; they would fight for each other at any time—except, of course, when they were fighting *with* each other. Even Ranny's downfall had been due to an offensive alliance between "Fatty" Hartman and Bud Hicks. The three of them had been trudging along by the brick church, Ranny in the middle, boasting peacefully and thinking of nothing in particular, when suddenly Bud had stooped over as if to tie his shoe; "Fatty" had given an unexpected shove, and Ranny

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had toppled over the crouching Bud into the soggy snowbank.

When he reached home he smuggled the water-logged arithmetic into the sitting-room and put it behind the coal-stove to dry. Presently he went out and threw snowballs at a knot-hole in the woodshed—a sorry sport, owing to the lack of some one who could throw almost as well, but not quite.

The vague longing retired into the back yard of Ranny's consciousness, but in the evening it came forth with startling abruptness. It was at that pleasantly precarious hour when the sands of wakefulness were running low. At any moment Father might look up from his paper and say:

“Mother, isn't it about time that a mutual young acquaintance of ours was going to bed?” And, no matter how absurdly early it was, Mother would agree. These people stood up for each other almost as if they were friends.

Ranny had finished his number-work—for better or for worse—but had hesitated to close the book for fear of disturbing the peaceful scene. But Mother had no such qualms; glancing up from her sewing, she suddenly exclaimed:

“Why, Ranny dear, what's the matter with your book—it's all stained and wrinkled?”

“That's nothin'. It fell in the snow a little.” With one of those quick conversational turns that

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are sometimes so helpful in emergencies, Ranny added, "Mother, I wisht I had a friend."

"Why, you have lots of friends, dear. What do you mean?"

"I mean chums like Ted an' 'Sausage' and—pert' near ever'body."

"What a horrid nickname for a boy."

Ranny saw that he would have to put the case in language which a mother could understand.

"A friend," he said, "tells you secruts an' comes home from school with you and calls you by your last name and you have fun ever' Saturday and—ever'thing." It seemed wisest not to introduce pugilism into the discussion.

"Why don't you make a friend of somebody at school," asked Father, "like Bud Hicks or that Hartman boy you call 'Fatty'?"

As though she rated Father's taste in companions rather low, Mother gave the conversation another twist.

"Father, I think it's time Ranny started to Sunday-school. He would be sure to find a nice play-mate there."

It was Mother-like to take advantage of a situation that way. For a long time Ranny had hung suspended between opposing views on the subject of Sunday-school. Mother had been distinctly, though not insisistently, favorable, but Father had a

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theory that it was not wise to take religious instruction "on an empty mind."

"Wait until he's a little older," Father had always said; "it will do him more good."

To-night, however, after a brief discussion, Father gave in, and it was agreed that Ranny was to set sail for the higher life on the following Sunday—by an odd coincidence in the very church into whose snowbank he had plunged that afternoon; and Ranny's wishes had not been consulted in this case any more than in the other. There might have been further sociability but for the bad taste of the sitting-room clock, which called attention to itself by striking nine.

In the secular days that intervened there were no further outrages (except amusing ones involving other victims), but still Ranny, though exposing himself constantly, had contracted no friendships. By Sunday morning he had begun to share Mother's hope that something of the sort might grow out of Sunday-school.

It devolved upon Mother to conduct her son to his session because, as the less reverend parent observed, she knew the ropes better than he did; and since it was important that he be prompt on the first day, it still lacked ten minutes of half past nine when Ranny, elegantly dressed and hopeful and only a little scared, was delivered over to a tall, whiskered

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man who for a moment ceased to look austere and asked, "How old are you, my little man?" Ranny replied, "Eight-going-on-nine," and was told to go and sit with the three other boys over by that colored window.

These youth, he found upon inspection, were packed into a giggling mass at one end of the pew on the theory, advanced by Tom Rucker, that the teacher was so fat she needed all the rest of the seat. Though skeptical upon this point, Ranny was delighted with the informal character of the proceedings and promptly converted himself into a hilarious sardine.

Also it was good to see Tom Rucker there. Tom was the only one of the class, eventually numbering eight, who was in Ranny's room at the center building; as such Tom formed a connecting-link between secular and religious instruction. He was about Ranny's height, but somewhat slighter in build; he wore freckles the year round. At school he was distinguished for his ability to move his ears by some mysterious internal power. Also he was the inventor and sole proprietor of the diversion of wedging his knees under his desk in such a way that by vibrating upon his toes he could produce a small earthquake that was distracting to young and old. He was a fellow of infinite jest and low marks in deportment. In short, Tom was the kind of boy one

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exchanged snickers with whenever the teacher said a funny big word like "conglomerate."

Miss Binford came, practically on time, and proved to be young and pretty, but far short of the advance notices as to fatness. Ranny was favorably impressed not only by her gracious welcome to the new pupil, but also by the edible-looking, unseasonable gooseberries on her hat.

The lesson that day concerned the forgiveness of enemies. "Love your enemies," the Golden Text admonished. "Do good to them which hate you." Miss Binford was eloquent and helpful on the subject and the gooseberries swayed violently with her earnest nods. It was not enough, she pointed out, to love those who love us; sinners do that sort of thing constantly. If some one smites us on one cheek we should turn the other (Miss Binford illustrated this graphically with her own cheeks and Ranny wondered whether any one had been smiting them lately). "We cannot expect to have our own sins forgiven," she concluded, "unless we forgive our enemies."

Ranny was impressed and vaguely troubled. Thinking about it afterward, he wished the teacher might have been a little more explicit on certain points; he had not liked to ask questions before all these advanced students of theology. If it was so important to forgive one's enemies, what would a

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person do who had no enemies to forgive? How did the likable Miss Binford, for example, keep up her supply of foes? As he considered these matters in that quiescent hour which followed the mid-afternoon Sunday dinner, Ranny reached the conclusion that it was much more important that he have an enemy than that he have a friend. Sinners went in for friendships, Miss Binford had said (and Ranny knew cases in point); conversely, having a friend must be dangerously near sinful.

With characteristic singleness of purpose he tried the new conception upon various schoolmates during the early days of the week; these boys did not know it, but they were being sized up for the position of private enemy to Randolph Harrington Dukes. "Fatty" Hartman was discreetly rejected because he was too big; Bud Hicks, because in times of hostility he would be too hard to forgive. Their shortcomings were in a sense unfortunate, because Mother, who had vetoed these boys as friends, would no doubt have welcomed either of them as an enemy. If Ranny had been able to frame his desire into a want advertisement, as one seeking a family horse, it would have read something like this:

ENEMY WANTED

Small and gentle and fond of children.

R. H. DUKES.

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On Thursday came the realization that, with the week slipping fatally toward another Sabbath, he was still on terms of sinful amity with the world. In a spirit of desperation, and not without regrets, Ranny finally settled upon Tom Rucker to fill the position. Tom's qualifications were numerous. Neither too muscular nor too aggressive for comfort and of a likable and genial disposition withal, Tom would make an ideal temporary enemy with little danger of becoming permanent. Tom had no ally sworn to ready violence. Moreover, being a Sunday-school pupil of the brick-church faith, Tom would understand the rules governing forgiveness—in fact, Tom had seemed so familiar with the doctrine, that while Miss Binford was expounding it he had not found it necessary to listen, but had secretly pointed out how funny the superintendent's whiskers looked in the shaft of yellow light from the colored window.

Ranny searched his memory for some grievance against Tom, but without reward. Their political differences had been adjusted. Tom had not participated in the late unpleasantness at the church snowbank, having, in fact, been kept in that afternoon for slipping off his rubber boots (as if it were Tom's fault that one of the boots had been passed back the aisle by willing hands, and that he had been asked to go to the blackboard while his footwear was off on a trip). True, Tom had poured water

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down Ranny's neck during the series of persecutions attending the letter-writing episode, but, try as he would, Ranny could not get angry over this ancient injury. On the whole, it seemed best to start a new grievance.

Accordingly, at half past three on Thursday afternoon, in fulfilment of his preliminary Christian duty, Ranny solemnly punched Tom Rucker in the region of the floating ribs. He pointed out that Tom was a hopeless victim of freckles and that he had ears something like a donkey's.

Tom, cut down in the middle of a waggish remark, was taken completely by surprise.

"Aw, wha'—wha'—wha's the matter with ya?" he asked, backing against Curtiss's picket fence.

This offensive question admitted of but one answer, and the militant brick-churchman landed a blow immediately below Tom's right ear.

Here Tom did a surprising thing; he neither struck back according to the best secular usage nor turned the other cheek in obedience to the Scriptures. He ran away. Once he stopped and picked up a piece of frozen snow, looked at it thoughtfully, and dropped it again. Presently he disappeared from view—a full-fledged enemy!

Public opinion was openly favorable; Ranny felt that his position in society was notably improved.

"What 'd he do to ya?" Bud Hicks asked.

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Fearing that his true motive would be hard to explain to the Philistines, Ranny answered, evasively, "He better not get smart with me!"

All present then declared simultaneously that Tom had better not get smart with them. Instead of turning homeward at the church corner Ranny drifted with the crowd to Cook's hardware-store, where all parties "skinned the cat" upon the hitching-rail until Mr. Cook personally requested them to stop—not only in words, but also by flourishing a snow-shovel. As the afternoon ebbed Ranny gradually went home.

Mother, little knowing what a desperate character her son had become since their last meeting, intrusted to him the care of the baby. In the secrecy of the bedroom he took his youthful sister into his confidence, glad to put the case in audible words.

"I got a enemy. I will furgive 'im to-morra. I couldn't furgive 'im to-day because he ran off."

The baby seemed duly impressed, and said, "Blah!"

"But he better not git smart aroun' me!" Ranny added.

The next day hostile sentiments were carried back and forth by volunteer trouble-makers, but by the time school was out Ranny, who was tired of having an enemy, approached Tom with an olive branch.

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"Come 'ere, Tom," he said.

"Well, whatcha want?" the enemy asked, refusing to leave his companions.

Ranny would have preferred privacy, but had to make the best of the faulty situation.

"'T's all right," he said. "I furgive you."

"What are ya talkin' about?" Tom asked.

The others, thinking Ranny had invented some new form of insult, closed in with high hopes.

It seemed to Ranny that his opponent showed surprising obtuseness for a veteran Sunday-school student, but since he could not say offhand just what he was forgiving Tom for, he had to temporize.

"You know—like they tell you in Sunday-school."

At this there was a wild outburst of heathenish glee and Ranny was handled roughly by one and all. "Fatty" scored a popular success by touching Ranny's head and making motions as of rapidly revolving wheels. There was a movement on foot to wash Ranny's face, but the victim broke away amid a shower of snowballs.

Moist and disheartened, shorn of his new prestige and dubious about the future, Ranny went home. And though Saturday was a time of mild sunshine and adhesive snow with the streets full of farmers' bobsleds, Ranny kept much to the back yard, safe from persecution. The long, lonely day drew to a close and he faced another Sunday-school with an unfor-

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given enemy who would be there in person. Yet what could you do when your enemy declined to be forgiven and went in for popular ridicule?

The lesson at Ranny's second Sunday-school was about another matter (apparently of special interest to gardeners), but first there was a moment of review.

"Who can tell," Miss Binford asked, "what the lesson was last Sunday?"

There was a moment of profound silence, during which one could hear what the superintendent was saying to the Bible class.

"Andrew, can't you tell us?"

The youth with red bow necktie, finding himself cornered, tried to escape with David, the giant-killer, but was repulsed with heavy loss.

Finally Ranny raised a timid hand.

"What was it, Randolph?" the teacher asked.

"You should forgive your enemies."

"That's right, Randolph!" The gooseberry season was over now on Miss Binford's hat and green roses waved their delight at Ranny's virtues. "The new scholar was the one who remembered. Now to-day let's all pay close attention and be good little boys like Randolph."

The bright new scholar flushed under the unwelcome tribute, his guilty secret burning in his throat like a live coal. Out of a corner of his eye he saw a baleful wrinkle on Tom's freckled nose and noted the

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derisive movement of the accomplished ears. As far as Ranny was concerned Miss Binford's exposition of the Parable of the Sowers fell upon stony ground; he was glad when the unprofitable session was at an end.

With the fading daylight his gloom deepened. In his brief career as a sinner he had already discovered that conscience hurts more at twilight than in the morning. Although Miss Binford had not said anything specific on the subject, he knew very well what happened to persons who were wicked. Ted Blake had only recently explained the matter in vivid detail, and Ted was an authority on wickedness, both by inheritance and in his own right. As Ranny stood at the sitting-room window and looked out upon the purpling snow, his spirits sank lower and lower and the lump in his throat swelled and rose like a great hot balloon.

"What's the matter, dear?" Mother asked, laying a cool hand upon his forehead. "Ar'n't you feeling well?"

Although he would have defended his shameful secret against harshness, or even ridicule, sympathy was more than his over-brimming heart could bear; so, in the presence of his parents and the astonished baby, he broke down. The baby started a sympathetic wail and was only comforted after a series of unhygienic "oops" conducted by Father.

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Ranny told his story between contractions of the diaphragm:

"The Sunday-school teacher said for us to furgive our enemies—I hadn't no enemy, so I picked on Tom Rucker—he gets mad an' runs away an' ever'thing—he won't let me furgive 'im—I hate 'im—I can't go to heaven." Irrelevantly he added, "Neither c'n Ted Blake."

There was silence while the parents exchanged perplexed glances.

"You'd better straighten out his theology," said Father. "I'm better at wagon-making."

"He ought to have begun with the Old Testament," said Mother, thoughtfully. "Children understand that better. It's all right, dear. You're not a bad boy. Now tell me just what you said after you struck Tom."

"The nex' day I said, 'I furgive you.'"

Here Father snorted and had to be suppressed.

"Don't worry about it any more, dear," Mother said. "To-morrow you must go to Tom Rucker and say you are sorry. It's he that must do the forgiving this time."

"Stick to him till he does," Father added.

Surprising information was forthcoming; it seemed that it was not really necessary to have an enemy. Many good people never had them at all. The important thing was not to hate anybody.

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"Tom must be a very bad boy," said Father, dolefully.

"He ain't, either," was Ranny's indignant reply. "He don't say bad words or steal or throw rocks—hardly ever."

"I'm glad of that."

To Mother he added some mysterious remarks about reaction from hostility.

The next afternoon, in accordance with a matured plan, Ranny left the other boys at the gate of the school-house and hurried away as one who had an important engagement with his sled. A détour of the back streets brought him to Cedar Avenue, where Tom should soon be making his way homeward. In order not to reveal himself prematurely Ranny hid behind a large tree; a small dog came floundering through the snow and threatened to dislodge him, but proved to be curious rather than hungry. Ranny kicked the tree nervously for a long time, but at last the enemy hove into sight, unsupported and unattended, alternately taking two or three running steps and sliding. Ranny stepped out and confronted him.

"Hello, Tom!" he said, with what was intended for a cordial smile.

"Aw, let me alone," said Tom, making a circle toward the street.

With a desperate feeling that his chance was slip-

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ping away again, Ranny forgot the formula that Mother had prescribed.

“Doggone you! If you don’t let me furgive you, I’ll punch you one!”

Punching took place forthwith—but not in accordance with the threat. Tom’s fist flew out defensively and grazed his tormentor’s cheek; its partner landed a jolting blow under Ranny’s eye. The two boys clinched, struggled for leg-holds, and fell into the deep snow, Tom unmistakably on top. Somehow they had fallen upside down to each other and Tom’s boots were waving perilously over Ranny’s face. At this point Ranny gave up trying to remember the rules of Christian conduct; he only knew that he had no desire to continue this unprofitable warfare. So he addressed Tom’s feet as follows:

“Rucker, I bet I c’n sling a snowball straighter ’n you.”

“Aw, you can’t, either,” replied Tom, magnanimously. Thus a friendship was born.

They gave each other a sketchy brushing off, then threw snowballs until they almost hit a window and deemed it best to go elsewhere. For a time they slid at a fine place by a leaky hydrant. Tom amazingly produced two cents, which they ran through in no time at Mrs. Leonard’s candy-store. After refreshment they jumped on a bobsled and

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rode clear to the third-ward school-house. On the way back they made a big snowball and rolled it down the hill back of the old tannery. They trod a wheel-shaped design in the snow and quarreled amicably about who should be the fox and who the goose. Also they scared a most laughable cat.

For the remaining days of their hitherto wasted lives they planned a series of lavish entertainments which included crawling through a hay tunnel, selling drugs in Ranny's "secret den" (only not now, because everything was "froze up and busted"), building a snow house behind Tom's barn, skating on the "Frogtown" pond, coasting down choice exclusive hills, making life difficult for "old Millsy" in school and well-nigh impossible for "Fatty" Hartman. Vague promises were exchanged involving spring and summer diversions. They Dukessed and Ruckered each other ostentatiously; they devised a private "holler" for summoning each other out of homes.

There were informal discussions of the prodigious quantity of confectionery they would consume if they were millionaires, the uselessness of girls in practical affairs, how ridiculous Chinamen were, moving pictures, collections of burned-out electric-light carbons, three sure cures for warts, and the importance of having a dog. They proved to have common tastes in jokes and a common distrust of

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Indians. In fact, save for a studied silence upon religious matters, they had run the whole gamut of human interests and emotions when, finally, in the fast-failing twilight, they arrived at Ranny's gate.

"Goo'-by, Rucker," said Ranny. "Don't furgit the holler."

"No, I won't. Listen f'r it in the mornin'."

"All right. Goo'-by."

"Goo'-by, Dukes. Don't tell 'Fatty' what I said."

"No, I won't. Goo'-by."

"Goo'-by."

Waiting for a moment until Tom's form had faded into the dusk, Ranny hurried in to enlighten his family as to the startling change that had taken place in Lakeville society. As he entered the side door Mother gave him an anxious, penetrating glance.

"For goodness' sake, Ranny!" she cried, as she pulled him into the lamplight, "where have you been—and what have you been doing to your clothes—and what on earth is the matter with your face?"

Ranny was surprised to find that the area below one eye was tender to Mother's touch.

"I had a fight with Rucker," he said, with a glowing, discolored smile. "He's my friend!"

IX

MALADY AFORETHOUGHT

RANNY was a cog in a perfect machine. "The Dukes family is like a clock," old Mr. Jennings had said to Ranny and his parents as he stopped for a chat one evening on the front porch. (Mr. Jennings lived across the street and did not work much any more, except at sprinkling the lawn and taking care of a safe sorrel horse named Nellie.) "Mrs. Jennings puts on the tea-kettle by you. Tom Dukes is the big hand and Ranny is the little hand, and a body could set his watch by you as you go to work and school. Now and then," he had added to Mother, "we catch a glimpse of you and we know you are the pendulum that keeps it all going steadily."

At this moment the baby had broken into violent protest somewhere within the house.

"We're an alarm-clock," Father had said, and everybody had laughed except the pendulum, which swung toward the bedroom.

But that conversation was six months deep in

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oblivion, and now, in February, Ranny trudged to school and back, twice daily, unconscious of the fact that he was one of the eternal verities. Miss Edith Mills, who was enjoying his society for the second year because she had two classes in one room, approved of his record just as she indorsed the North Star for its negative virtue of constancy, but it never occurred to her to mention the matter publicly. If it had not been for the case of Bud Hicks, Randolph Harrington Dukes might never have learned that he was one with the ebb and flow of the tides and the procession of the equinoxes.

Miss Mills broke the news to the class one forenoon before the school was dismissed. They would all be sorry, she knew, to hear of the serious illness of a schoolmate; Raymond Hicks had taken diphtheria and was very ill. He would probably get well, but it would be a long, long time before he could come back to school. They should all be sorry for Raymond, especially since his little friends could not go to see him, as his disease was catching. And nobody should make a noise near Raymond's home.

Even in this moment of sensation Ranny could not help noting the contrast between the teacher's tone to-day and that of last week when Bud had been proven guilty of putting her overshoes in the waste-basket. Bud had somehow acquired dignity and standing along with diphtheria.

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On the way home Ranny was reveling in the fresh new friendship of Tom Rucker. There was a rare sedateness in the home-going group that cold, snowless noontime; not only had Miss Mills's solemn announcement affected the spirit of the boys, but Bud's illness had removed one of the school's most prominent ruffians.

"Bud could sling awful straight," said Tom, in the tone of one suddenly discovering virtues in the departed. This tribute had the desired effect upon Ranny.

"I 'speck he's purty sick," he replied.

"I had chicken-pox one time," said Tom. "I was outa school two weeks."

"That's nothin'. I had scarlet fever 'nd had to stay home the rest of the term—had my hair shingled off 'nd ever'thing." This boast, alas! was not Ranny's, but that of "Fatty" Hartman.

"Yes, you did," said Ranny.

"Betcha a million dollars."

This modest wager was promptly accepted; if it had involved something of tangible value like a squirt-gun or three cents, Ranny would have considered the matter seriously before betting on "Fatty's" health history. As it was, the argument attracted other historical invalids, among them "Colly" Collander, who claimed to have been out of school with the mumps; and "Tinny" Maloney,

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who had enjoyed a broken leg. Clarence Raleigh tried to break into this distinguished company with a sore throat, but was only laughed at because his alleged illness had only kept him home two days; that was practically the same as remaining well.

And Ranny? Poor Ranny tried to bluster his way through by doubting everybody's word, but as the returns kept coming in he was gradually reduced to silence. In the evening after school he accompanied the crowd around to Bud's street, where all enjoyed a clear but distant view of the diphtheria sign, but he had no heart for the entertainment and went home feeling like one of the submerged tenth.

For as far back as written history went, Ranny had been a perfectly healthy boy. There was a tradition in the family that he had whooped a great deal during his third year; and he himself dimly remembered an unpleasant period in his still tender youth that was labeled "measles." These ailments, however, were wasted upon the prescholastic period before statistics began. Now that he had attained to his ninth year and a practical working knowledge of long division (but not too long) there was nothing that he could call attention to with any degree of pride. And here was Bud Hicks, a person who was known to get a whipping every time he brought his deportment-card home, suddenly acquiring prestige and amnesty through an easily contracted malady.

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Bud would get well, of course; but note this—it would be a long, long time before he could come back to school. Upon reflection, Ranny was not sure that Miss Mills had not used three “longs.”

He touched upon the matter as he was drying the supper dishes—Father’s mortgage had now been paid off and Ranny was again reaping his weekly reward in cash.

“Mother,” he asked, “how does boys git sick?”

“Be careful with that glass!” Presently Mother went on, less fluently, but more to the point: “Why—there are lots of things that cause sickness. You might eat green apples, or get your feet wet, or break an arm, or—” Here Mother switched to precept by example: “Raymond Hicks caught it; he went near somebody who had diphtheria. You got the measles that way when you were little.”

Thrilling a little at the free use of the intimate second person, Ranny pursued the subject further.

“How does it feel to be sick?”

“Thank goodness you don’t know!” Mother responded, fervently. “You have pains and fevers and you have to stay in bed all day and keep away from school and eat only special things.”

If Mother thought she was painting a revolting picture of disease and pestilence, she greatly over-rated her powers. As he lay in his bed that night Ranny’s mind played hungrily with the idea of not

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having to get up in the morning, of staying home from school, and of eating exclusive dishes. He conjured up thrilling little scenes; the teacher's announcement; Josie Kendal looking with awe at the vacant seat behind hers and wishing she had treated its late owner with more respect; boys meeting with one another and saying, "He's purty sick," and recounting matters of interest about the stricken one—his guinea-pigs, his political views, his efforts on behalf of the candyless poor, and how he once almost ran away from home. Tom Rucker would be bowed down with loneliness and would renounce frivolous pleasures like wiggling his ears. Before he slept Ranny resolved that a way must be found of breaking himself of this monotonous habit of health.

His first attempt was impulsive and ill-advised; he did not devote to it that care and thought with which one should approach new duties. Mother had been tying his morning necktie and had given it that final pat which was a token of dismissal.

"I don't wanta go to school to-day," Ranny found courage to say. "I don't feel so very well."

Mother looked at him with astonishment not unmixed with apprehension. Ranny had never before tried to evade the processes of education—and of course there *was* diphtheria in town. She laid her hand upon his forehead, looked at his tongue, commented briefly upon the normally hearty breakfast

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he had eaten, and finally sent him off into the cold world. Since he did not see the anxious eyes at the window as he went down the path, Ranny was convinced that, as an invalid, he was a total failure.

School did not restore his spirits. There was some disagreement between him and his teacher in the matter of the spelling of the word "thier," and he was made to appear in the wrong. Later he received dishonorable mention when he had done nothing but tell a little joke to Josie Kendal (who was amused too publicly). And then there was the announcement that their "dear schoolmate" seemed a little better to-day.

Ranny saw that he must concoct a plan that would hold water. As he searched the back yard for inspiration in the late afternoon he reviewed Mother's unwitting instructions to aspiring invalids. Getting his feet wet did not seem practical this cold, dry winter day; green apples were out of season (besides, they didn't hurt you if you ate them with salt). The back yard was poorly equipped with places to fall from and break an arm—there was something distasteful in that idea, anyway. He came to the conclusion that the simplest way was to catch things. He would read the evening paper for suggestions and pick out a disease to his taste—preferably lingering, but neither dangerous nor painful.

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But the *Bulletin* that night seemed to have very little to offer. Mr. Thompson's rheumatism, so Father said, with an irreverent chuckle—this was in the sitting-room after supper—was like that gentleman's money, not communicable.

"Why, son? Were you thinking of catching some rheumatism?"

Ranny always enjoyed Father's good spirits, but he did not feel that he could invite his parents' co-operation in the present enterprise, because of their deep-seated prejudices.

If the situation became desperate there was Bud's diphtheria to fall back upon; he could always go and catch that. This thought gave him a comfortable feeling, like having money in the bank for a rainy day.

By Friday evening it seemed that the "rainy day" was imminent. Night after night he had searched the paper in vain for interesting complaints. There were no new epidemics, no contagious diseases, only unhelpful ailments. Now and then a person was confined to his home with a bad cold, a woman had survived an operation for appendicitis, but that was about all. Even Mr. Thompson's irrelevant rheumatism was now out of print. And with a goading, insulting persistency, Webber, the reliable druggist, kept offering to cure the human race of all manner of ills with fifty-cent packages and one-dollar bottles.

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Day after day had come the bulletins of Bud's condition; and every afternoon youth dug into the dusty past and revealed horrible things. Ranny could see that he was suffering in public esteem; Tom Rucker, himself, had begun to treat him like a poor relation. The friendship of Tom and Ranny had passed its first fervency and was in its dangerous second month. If he did not act quickly, Bud would get well and Ranny would be left high and dry on the hopeless shores of good health. Better have diphtheria, he thought, than no disease at all. The next day would be Saturday and there would be plenty of time to catch things: by school-time Monday he would be bedridden.

Having resolved upon his course of action, he spent a most agreeable evening; he was especially careful about the dishes and he got Father's footstool without being asked even once. When he was on his bed of pain his parents would have nothing but the pleasantest recollections of his last hours of health. On the other hand, it seemed foolish to waste any time over the arithmetic lesson assigned for Monday.

In the morning Ranny, having disposed of an unusually hearty breakfast (the last for some time of the commonplace kind of food that parents and healthy people ate), quietly removed his overcoat, cap, and mittens to the "secret den" in the wood-

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shed in order that he might not take cold while on more important business. When Mother was not looking he departed by the alley gate, not neglecting to take a last comprehensive look at the treasures he would not see for some time. Father, he hoped, would take good care of the guinea-pigs, but keep out of the "secret den" and not mix things up.

When Ranny reached the home of Bud Hicks he experienced a delicious thrill at the sight of the yellow sign, "Diphtheria"; the last time he had seen it—not then being bent on health suicide—he had run past, holding his breath. Now he walked boldly up to the side door and knocked as if he had come to borrow a cup of sugar instead of a germ.

Ranny had a fairly definite idea of asking to see the invalid, whom he would remember to speak of respectfully as "Raymond." That he might actually be refused admittance did not occur to him; he assumed that if he elected to contract disease it was his own affair. The door opened, disclosing a cautious strip of Mrs. Hicks's face, and closed abruptly, leaving him hale and hearty in the open air. A moment later there were tappings on the side window and motions indicating clearly that he was to go away. Instead he retreated to the alley, where he collected his faculties for a flank movement toward the back yard. He knew which was Bud's window, because he had thrown pebbles at it on the

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morning of the last circus day. Fortunately it was partly open. With the aid of a piece of stove-wood placed against the house he raised himself to the level of the sill, where he could look in and assure himself of a working supply of microbes.

Sure enough, there was Bud in the bed, unattended and apparently asleep. After breathing the unsalubrious air for a time, Ranny was seized with a desire for sociability.

"Hello, Bud!" he called out. "How you feelin'?"

The invalid opened his eyes, saw the apparition at the window, and emitted a distressed cry for his mother; Bud had apparently taken his position as a public nuisance very seriously. Ranny caught a glimpse of Mrs. Hicks charging dangerously in his direction; then, as he shifted his balance, the wood went out from under his feet and the sick-room disappeared from view.

At night Ranny rolled and wallowed in his bed, nervously looking forward to the morrow. The bed was unaccountably lumpy, his elbow was bruised, and the white curtains waving in the little air-opening did an irritating ghost-dance until it seemed wisest not to look at the window any more. Except, of course, on Christmas Eve, Ranny had never found it so hard to get to sleep—and what a difference between to-morrow and Christmas!



THEY FELT HIM OVER WITH CHILLY FINGERS AND MADE HIM SHOW HIS TONGUE

Strohm

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The day's events passed and repassed in unending procession like an army of ten men on a stage—the trip to Bud's house, the stand at the window, the fall, the neighbor woman conducting him home (less concerned about his future than about the bread she had left in the oven), Mother's frightened summons of the doctor, the smell of burning sulphur, the poking of foreign substances into his throat. Then a meager collation of milk and toast, an afternoon in bed, with a growing realization that good sliding was being wasted upon unworthy persons, and now this—a bumpy bed, a window-curtain that "acted up," and parents coming in occasionally to feel his forehead. Then the whole thing over again. As for to-morrow, Ranny began to wonder whether, considering Mother's anxiety and all, it wouldn't be better if he could get up sound and well.

The rest of his ruminating Ranny did in the bright morning light. To his surprised relief he had no unusual sensations. If he were any judge of things, he could easily jump up, slip in by the coal-stove and dress. Just as he was gathering courage to leave the warm bed his parents began to take a hand in his affairs. They felt him over, as parents will, with chilly hands, made him show his tongue, and asked him whether it hurt him to swallow. Presently, although all signs showed him to be as robust as "Fatty" Hartman, they ordered him to lie still

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until it was time for milk and toast. This program was adhered to in spite of his assertion that he had all the sleep, milk, and toast his system craved.

It was after this alleged breakfast that Ranny faced his real ordeal—a heart-to-heart talk with Father. Approaching the subject with a leisurely Sunday air, Father began asking queer and unrelated questions like, “Isn’t Bud Hicks a fine boy?” and, “How would you like it if you had to stay home from school?” Before Ranny was aware of the purport of these questions he had made some damaging admissions—in fact, Father’s campaign of exposure soon laid his plot pretty bare. It was decreed that Ranny was to stay in bed, although the day was a notably fine one and Father would have been glad for youthful company in a walk down to the post-office and perhaps a look at the lake to see how the ice was getting on. For dinner Ranny was to have milk and toast, but, unfortunately, none of the fried chicken which he understood Mother was preparing. This was not wholly calamitous because there would be just so much more for those who enjoyed good health.

“Ain’t I goin’ to have anything to eat?” asked Ranny, who had by this time ceased to regard milk and toast in the light of provender.

“Yes,” Father replied, cheerfully. “The doctor

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says that this evening, if all goes well, you may have some nice orange-juice."

Ranny searched Father's face, but saw only pity there. Realizing that the day was lost, he turned his thoughts toward the future.

"Must I be sick to-morrow?"

"We'll see how you feel in the morning."

It was a hungry, lingering day of brown, bitter medicine, delicious dinner-time odors, and of Father's exasperating new enthusiasm over the beauties of nature. In a world of fried chicken and sunshine and peaceful Sunday sounds Ranny lay in a narrow bed, seeking impossible passageways through the entangled flowers on the wall-paper—a most profitless pursuit. Night brought the relief of darkness and a firm resolution that in the morning he would dress, demand a hearty and civilized breakfast, and go to school. He had all the sickness, real or approximate, that he needed.

In the morning there were further thumpings and explorations, a consultation outside the door, carried on with unseemly levity, and finally he was allowed to get up. A breakfast followed, the memory of which did much to sustain him through the difficult day, a self-respecting collation of ham and eggs and pancakes and fried potatoes. Journeying toward school, he found that the air was of that crisp, cold variety that makes long-unused legs go skipping and

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hopping uncontrollably and hunting places to slide. Miss Mills greeted him with unusual warmth and was complacent about his unprepared number-work. This was evidence that she had not heard about his escapade, his violation of her express commands about going near Bud's house.

Just before noon and adjournment the teacher made her usual announcement about the satisfactory progress of the dear schoolmate; then, with a fine feeling for climaxes, unveiled her great surprise.

"We should all be glad," said Miss Mills, "to see Randolph Dukes with us to-day." Josie Kendal, with a sort of reflex defensive movement, pulled her brown pigtail over her shoulder to safety. There were thumpings in Ranny's chest and a desire to disappear into the floor, as is sometimes done in moving pictures. "On Saturday Ranny went to Raymond's window and looked in. Of course he shouldn't have done this, no matter how much he wanted to see his little playmate" (embarrassment here aggravated by a slight snicker from "Fatty" Hartman), "but fortunately Raymond has passed the most dangerous period and Ranny is here safe and sound, without having to miss school."

Here followed a surprising eulogium upon Ranny's exemplary record. Miss Mills, who had looked up the facts in his career, announced sensationally that he had not been absent or tardy since he began going

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to school. "I doubt," she concluded, dramatically, "if there is another such record in Lakeville."

For a moment Ranny floated in a haze of delicious embarrassment; then as the pupils filed out he came down to earth with an uncomfortable jolt. What would the boys say about his new honors? He had never openly admitted that he had not missed a day in school. Praise from the teacher was by no means a straight road to popularity—in fact, it often gave rise to a very objectionable epithet.

So, not caring to risk the uncertain verdict of his peers, Ranny left the other pupils at the school-house gate and hurried home, where he was sure his merits would be appreciated. And, barring the time required to fall down and get up again at the slippery place in front of Mrs. Leonard's candy-store, he arrived home at the earliest possible moment.

"Mother," he exclaimed, as he burst into the house, "I've never been absent or tardy—or anything! Miss Mills says it's the best record in Lakeville—mebbe!"

Mother greeted this information with a flushed and joyful face, and if she had any troublesome memories about his two recent attempts upon that record she was tactful enough to conceal them.

"I'm glad my boy likes school so much," she said.

"Ain't you glad I'm so well an' healthy?"

Presumably Mother thought that squeezing a

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person very tight and making it difficult for him to breathe was equivalent to a reply in the affirmative.

Father also was gratified by the new honor that had come to his home, but was inclined to give some credit to Mother and some to heredity.

"The Dukeses were always a healthy lot," he concluded. "They couldn't be sick if they *wanted* to." Whether there was any especial meaning to this remark, Ranny could not be sure.

But, after all, parents can be expected to back up teachers, even when right. Again—what about the rising generation? Could he avoid them until they had forgotten about his exploit? Or should he try?

A boy's prestige is a thing of gossamer, capricious as the wind. If Bud Hicks could have been there in person at the mid-afternoon recess to set the tone of the conversation, Ranny might have gone down to disgrace with the brand of teacher's pet. Or if Tom Rucker had been apprehended as the author of the paper wad which struck South America in the Tropic of Capricorn and had been kept in at recess, the day might have been ruined. As it was, Tom justified his friendship for Ranny and put it upon an enduring basis.

"I bet," he said to that part of the universe which surrounded the school-house pump, "Ranny Dukes is the healthiest fella here."

"*I'm* a healthy fella," said "Fatty" Hartman.

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“Yah!” Ranny sneered. “Didn’t you have scarl’t fever? Didn’t you git y’r hair shingled ’nd stay outa school? You said so y’r *own* self. Didn’t he, Tom? Didn’t he, ‘Colly’?”

“Fatty” was convicted and had water poured upon him by the wit who held the dipper. At this point in the history of Lakeville ill-health went out of style.

“I was only out of school two days,” Clarence Raleigh said. But that youth, who had been black-balled by the chronic invalids, also failed to get into the good-health class.

“You all git sick.” The wave of Ranny’s arm comprehended most of the solar system.

“I betcha,” said Tom, opening up new and beautiful vistas, “Ranny ain’t afraid a nuthin’.”

On the following Saturday a member of the alien (and therefore inferior) race of east-warders was publicly chastised by a casual acquaintance of the new hero for alleging that Ranny was afraid to swallow a nail.

X

BREAKING OUT OF SOCIETY

CONSCIOUS of his new prestige as a bold and healthy hero, Ranny yet wandered about in the back yard in the late winter afternoon and held himself in low esteem. He was despondent because there were no Indians to shoot and no weapons to shoot them with, because he did not wear khaki clothes with leggings, and because there were no maidens requiring rescue. He also had some twinges of pain because he was not a colored cook in a dining-car—always traveling and adjacent to food. In short, he had been to a moving-picture show.

He tried to play over a few of these glories upon the home grounds, but, either because the light was too good or his imagination too poor, nothing whatever happened. The back yard remained a back yard and the woodshed obstinately refused to become a mountain cave from which a maiden could be carried away, to the disgust of low, dark characters. Entering the house, he contemplated his baby sister, the only maiden he knew well enough to rescue.

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but she was safe in her crib and seemed hopelessly permanent. She only bubbled a little as if from the unexpected pleasure of his company. His life was drab and commonplace, and, had it not been for a rather tasteful supper, his evening would have been a total loss.

After a night's rest he was somewhat reconciled to his lot—because it was morning and Saturday and the world was young. Besides, shortly after breakfast Tom Rucker made a joyful noise in front of the house and threw stones at a fence-post until Ranny could come out and learn what, if anything, was on his mind.

“The lake is awful solid and slick,” Tom reported. “Git your sled.”

“I don't know if my mother 'll let me,” replied Ranny.

But Mother, after some hesitation, yielded to Tom's superior knowledge. Although not an untruthful boy, Tom somehow managed to convey the impression that all parents were giving three cheers for the ice and that thousands of people were already at the lake. So presently a spirited team dragged the sled over the snowless ground. The ice proved to be all that its warm admirer had said of it; a succession of snowless, zero days had left the lake a miracle of “slickness.” The beauty and chivalry of Lakeville, and Ranny's intimates who

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belonged to neither of these classes, were falling here and there with pleasing cries of pain. The boys and girls of Ranny's age were keeping meticulously apart, but those shameless characters of high school and vicinity—youths who wore high collars on weekdays and sometimes carried books for girls—did not scruple to skate openly with the fair sex. To Ranny and his contemporaries this was one of the penalties of living to an advanced age.

Soon there was a commotion at the edge of the ice and some large boys were seen rigging up an ice-boat which was at once surrounded by spectators and volunteer advisers. Presently came an ominous sound underfoot like the croaking of some gigantic frog. As a matter of fact, there was no real danger—this was only one of nature's practical jokes—but in the first moment of panic nobody stopped to recall that fact. Ranny and Tom, like everybody else, preserved their lives vigorously, but Ranny's conception of the short cut to safety intersected that of Josie Kendal, the girl who sat in front of him at school. She did not sit in front of him now, but upon him. In the instant while his own face was pressed close to the ice and Josie was poking him unnecessarily with the sharp point of a skate, it occurred to Ranny that in the hour of peril he had not done anything to save Josie's life, as a fearless and healthy person should, but had thought selfishly of his own.

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In his shame he forgot public opinion and tried to make amends by helping Josie to her feet. She returned the compliment when he fell down immediately afterward. It is possible that Ranny might have withdrawn from the affair at this point with an untarnished name. But some evil fate that had nothing better to do prompted him to say:

“Git on the sled an’ I’ll haul you out of this.”

Josie did so, aiding progress with the heels of her skates, and laughing amiably whenever Ranny, in accordance with his custom, informally sat down. Before long it appeared that Tom Rucker was being scandalized by this philandering and that the general public was beginning to make remarks. In his anger at the way Ranny had deserted him for a mere girl, Tom turned to the drama to express his feelings. He and “Fatty” Hartman locked arms and strutted about appallingly. In that falsetto which he fondly imagined was a perfect imitation of the girlish voice—though it resembled nothing in nature—“Fatty” exclaimed:

“Oh, mercy! Isn’t it slippery?”

The laughter over this lack-witted sally was one of the most mortifying things that Ranny had ever endured. He felt his ears growing hot and he knew that he was turning red all over. He looked appealingly at Josie.

“Now you’re all right,” he said, politely, meaning

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that the incident was closed and that her absence was cordially requested.

But Josie, though a skater, was in no hurry to skate; far from being embarrassed, she seemed to be enjoying the situation of which she was the center. The giggles of her girl friends she took as an ovation instead of an insult. Ranny had a strong impulse to pick up the end of the sled and dump his lady friend out upon the ice, but in the society in which he moved girls could not be treated with disrespect any more than with deference. They must not be treated at all.

Finally Josie wearied of the game and decided to skate.

"Thank you, Ranny," she said, sweetly.

"Y'r welcome." He had to say that, but there was no law compelling him to shout it at the top of his voice.

Josie's thanks probably pertained to the ride, but Tug Wiltshire advanced the theory that girls always did that when their lives were saved. "She's your girl," said Tug. "I seen it in a book. If you save 'em they're your girl." It was not the first time that Tug's passion for reading had caused trouble.

"I didn't save 'er. I knocked 'er down—that's what I done. They hadn't aughta let girls come out on the ice, anyway, always gittin' in the way an' fallin' down an' ever'thing."

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But this harsh judgment deceived nobody. Tug maintained that she was his girl, whether he liked it or not, and cited instances. His bookish theory was promptly accepted by the rabble, and Ranny had the guilty secret knowledge that the moving-picture show had borne out Tug's contention. Unable to make headway against this ridicule, he left his companions and started home. This move proved to be a mistake, for it afterward laid him open to the charge that he had carried Josie's skates home for her, as was the custom of the senile.

Ranny wasted the glorious afternoon in being kind to his family. When he was building houses of blocks in order that his young sister might exercise her natural talent for destruction, the house was suddenly attacked by afternoon callers. He was trapped. He had to endure the gushes of two ladies over the baby—who was nothing much, so far as he could see—and their pats upon his head.

"Ranny looked just like her when he was a baby," said Mother. "I'll show you his picture."

The victim dropped his construction work and fled. That picture in the family album was the skeleton in his closet. The clothing of the infant Ranny had not been suited to the requirements of a decent and temperate zone. It strongly suggested some pictures in his book, *The Life of Henry M.*

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Stanley. From his hiding-place under the dining-room table he heard one of the ladies say:

"Oh, isn't he sweet!"

All this suffering because in a moment of melodrama he had asked Josie Kendal to ride on his sled.

Neither did the Sabbath bring forgetfulness. On Monday morning in school Josie persisted in being friendly.

"Better look out," said Ranny, gruffly. "She'll see you."

"You were *nice* to me on Saturday," Josie replied, with a reproachful smile.

The watchful waiters of the neighborhood saw these amenities; their pleasure was made perfect by Miss Mills's sharp command:

"Josie, turn around, please!"

Other girls in the class now seemed to take a friendly interest in Ranny's existence. Thus Monday revealed Ranny treated with kindness by the girls and disrespect by the boys—a thing to blast a promising career. At dismissal in the afternoon he was pushed toward a group of gigglers containing Josie. He went home and stayed there, preferring to let splendid ice go to waste rather than to run the risk of being thrown—perhaps literally—into Josie's society. But Josie, for some reason, did not appear at the lake that afternoon, either. The boys

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next day entertained a theory that Ranny had been at her house playing with dolls. He was in that desperate position where everything he said or didn't say, everything he did or failed to do, was used against him.

When the week had succeeded in getting as far as Wednesday, and the outlook seemed as black as it could be, there came the horrible news that Josie Kendal was going to give a valentine party. When Ranny's invitation came, Father made some humorous reference to "a prominent society man," but Mother spoke thoughtfully of the need for a new necktie. Ranny went to school with a seal of silence upon his lips. The secret would have been easier to keep but for the fact that nearly everybody of his acquaintance had also received an invitation. There were delighted whisperings among the girls and Josie was constantly giving and receiving messages in the sign language. At recess the boys took their disgust to the pump and all vowed that they would not go to such a function for a million dollars. Ranny, seeing a possibility here, put the price of his attendance at two millions.

"You *gotta* go," said Tom, the unforgiving. "I guess it was got up for you. It's your own fault they's goin' to be a party."

"'Tain't, either, my fault," said Ranny. "Nobody could make me go—the marshal or anybody."

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This seemed a safe boast, for the police force, Lon Higgins by name, though he wore a star, had never been known to compel people to go to parties.

"I betcha," said "Fatty" Hartman, "you'll send 'er one of them purty valentines an' sling away three cents."

Ranny denied this charge with all earnestness, but the valentine idea sent him home at noontime filled with vague anxieties. What if Josie should choose that public occasion to hand him one of those damaging lacy affairs of flowers and hearts and shameless little naked boys!

"Mother," he said, "don't spend no money for that there necktie. I ain't— I guess I can't—I don't like parties very much."

"Why, what do you mean?" Mother chose this time for quibbles. "You've scarcely every been to a party. Of course you're going."

Curiously enough, there was very little boasting in the afternoon about the flattering offers all would refuse to attend Josie's function. By the next day it was tacitly understood that a party was one of those visitations which are inevitable. It was such a change of heart as is not uncommon in governmental circles, where it is known as "hearing from home." The blustering was now done exclusively by "Sausage" Buckley, of "Frogtown," who lived in a social stratum several layers below Josie. "Sausage"

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blustered and swaggered and ridiculed all of Josie's victims and made himself a public pest. His former crony, Ted Blake, unable to deny his charges, had to deal with "Sausage" in a physical way.

On the fateful Friday morning Ranny arose and, like the condemned man of tradition, ate a hearty breakfast. But just as this meal was drawing to a close the young bookkeeper came over from Father's factory, as was his recent custom, bringing the family letters.

"Why, here's one for Ranny," said Father. "My goodness! the mail that fellow gets."

Ranny's heart bounded joyfully, then stopped and refused to do any more work. This was clearly not a regular letter; neither was it one of those cheap yellow envelopes in which one sends insulting valentines to one's friends.

"I—I guess I won't open it now," he said. "I'm kinda late."

Mother gave him a searching look as if she feared that he had suddenly become another kind of boy.

"Oh yes, open it," she said. "Maybe it's a valentine."

In a moment his worst fears were realized. To be sure, he was spared the naked boy, but here were the time-worn forget-me-nots and the heart pierced and bleeding in the old reliable way. There were also two lines of tender sentiment, which Father seemed

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to think it necessary to read, and, scrawled at the bottom, the mortifying, ear-heating name, "Josie."

Now one of the best things Ranny had noticed about his parents was that they never committed or encouraged foolish jests about sweethearts. They now held true to form, unconscious, in their virtue, that the rest of the world was conducting itself differently.

"On the way to the party this afternoon," Mother said, in a matter-of-fact tone, "you may stop at Mrs. Leonard's store and spend five cents for a valentine to give to Josie."

Mother's idea probably was that everybody else would come to the party thus equipped. What she was proposing was utter ruin, yet, so great was his burden of shame, he could not tell her of his week of trouble. He escaped to his room with a vague idea of destroying the valentine, but decided, instead, to put it in a secret place where he could occasionally look at it and be ashamed safe from the eyes of the world. While doing so he matured a deliberate and lawless plan. He would submit to Sunday clothes and a new necktie, he would buy the valentine and find some sneaking, underhand way of getting it to Josie. But he would *not* go to the party.

At school the boys were hopeless, the girls excited and nervous. Josie's wireless was working con-

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stantly, but she found time to pin Ranny down and watch him squirm. He grudgingly admitted that he had received the valentine.

"I'll tell you a secret, if you promise not to tell." Her confidences could not have been placed in safer hands. "We're going to have cocoa."

"That's good," said Ranny, uneasily. He was fond of cocoa.

As the alleged merrymaking was to begin right after school, maternal Lakeville forced its sons and daughters into polite garments at the noon hour. Ranny suffered the common penalty and came back in the afternoon disguised as a lily of the field adorned with a shameless bow-tie of blue. Of course there were persons without social responsibilities who were not disguised at all, but the sartorial batting average was high. The general impression was as of impending Washington's Birthday exercises. "Fatty" Hartman had the elegant appearance and dejected air of one who is expected to speak a piece. Bud Hicks had a sickly, washed-out look, and Tom Rucker's freckled face peered over a high, white collar. "Sausage" arose to new heights of arrogance; he flaunted a hole in his stocking as if it had been awarded to him for taking a city.

Of the girls, the less said the better. Fresh-ribbed hair, flaring skirts, sashes, and white stockings met the startled eye on every hand. Josie herself

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was in sober garb. A stranger might have thought that she had not been invited to the party, but the girls knew that a fluffy and creamy confection, too delicate for the dusty school-room, was awaiting her return.

After school Ranny hurried off homeward as if to add further indignities to his toilet. At Mrs. Leonard's store he faithfully invested his nickel in a valentine which expressed a high quality of friendship, but did not commit itself further. He now betook himself by ways that were dark to Tom Rucker's barn and climbed into the haymow by an exclusive private entrance. Here he settled down, safe from adults, girls, scoffers, parties, cocoa—he wished he had not thought of cocoa. To put away temptation, he considered schemes to get the valentine off of his hands. He would slip around after dark and stick it in the box in which the boy puts the evening paper. Nobody would notice him; they would be playing silly games and suffering and drinking cocoa—he jerked his mind away with an effort. Anyway, his future was now secure. He would ridicule everybody who had been so weak as to go to the party; he would make them wish they had never been born. If anybody ever said “Josie” to him again he would reply:

“Yes, who went to Josie's party and played with girls and drank—” This time he got a recollection

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of something a little bitter and at the same time sweet, surmounted by whipped cream, tasteful and fragrant and strongly suggesting another cupful. Ranny was not the first to discover that it is one thing to hide from the world and another to escape from one's memories.

In the dim and dusty haymow of the Rucker barn Ranny fought his hopeless fight with temptation. The fumes of imaginary cocoa weakened his moral fiber and made his mouth water. His interior bore false witness that it had not known food since the middle of the previous week. It was a thoroughly beaten boy who presently climbed down the ladder and took his desperate and hungry way toward the Kendal home. Cake alone he could have resisted, or ice-cream—on this winter day—but of all the delicacies of a fruitful world, it had to be cocoa!

He dragged his unwilling feet up the steps and was admitted by Mrs. Kendal herself.

"Well, Ranny, you are late," she said, brightly.

"Yes, ma'am," said Ranny. "I had to— I been some place."

If social affairs were conducted upon a frank system of give and take Ranny would have exchanged his five-cent valentine for two cups of cocoa—to be consumed in the hall—and would have gone his joyful way. As it was, he let his hand linger unconsciously upon the envelope half protruding from

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his overcoat pocket and became in Mrs. Kendal's eyes the embarrassed bearer of gifts.

"What's this, Ranny?" she inquired, helpfully.

"A valentine—for Josie." This was in the tone of one breaking sad news.

"Oh, how nice!" said Mrs. Kendal, and as she opened the door which led to scenes of gaiety she called out: "Here's Ranny, dear. He's brought you a lovely valentine. Now you must let him take you out to supper."

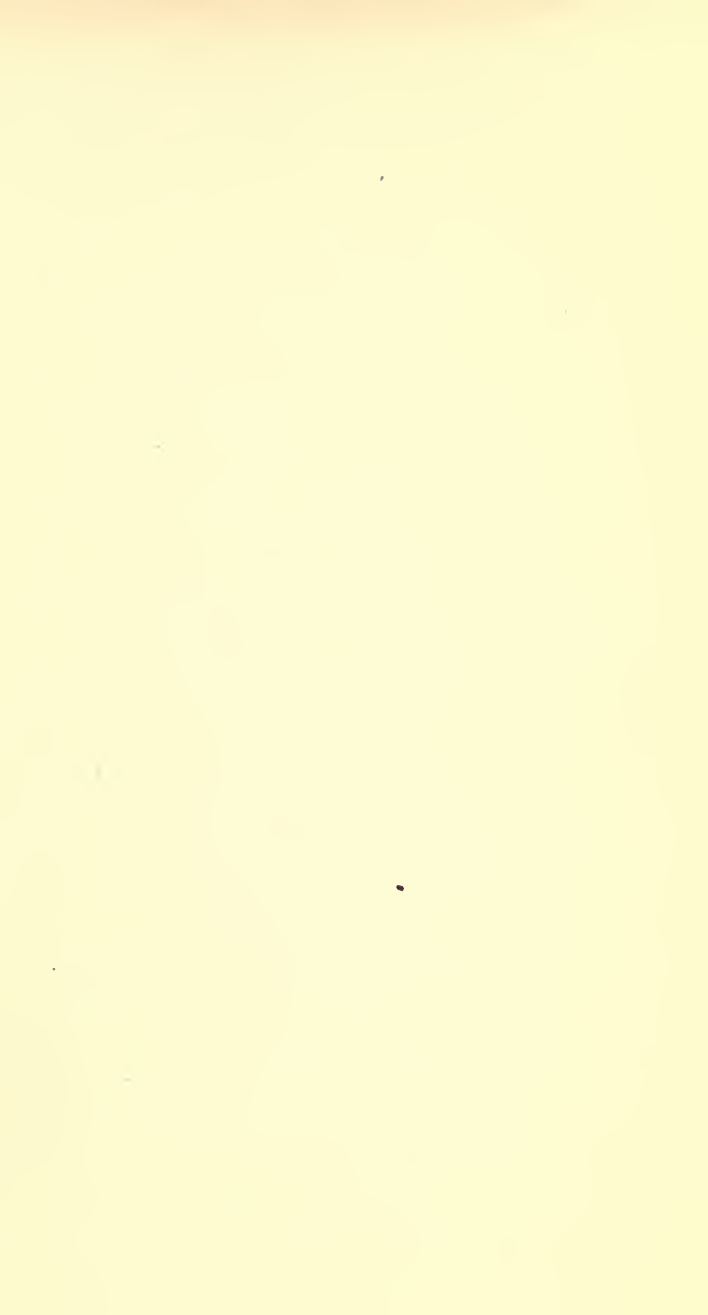
A vision of creaminess and fluffiness came forward and gave Ranny a warm welcome. "Fatty" Hartman, who had seated himself near the dining-room door against possible emergencies, lost all control of himself and snickered into his hand. Tom Rucker almost ceased to look unhappy, and girls beamed maddeningly. Probably in all social history nobody had ever paid such a high price for a cup of cocoa. The only light in the gloom was the fact that the other boys also were compelled to escort girls to supper. This was managed by Mrs. Kendal in a masterful way that stopped just short of physical force. Ted Blake wore a frozen and mirthless smile and allowed a great deal of daylight to intervene between himself and his escortée. Bud Hicks walked as one alone in a vast plain with night coming on.

The cocoa came in as per contract, steaming and covered with whipped cream, but in cups that were



Shoreman.

THE ONLY LIGHT IN THE GLOOM



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built more for looks than for capacity—not particularly wide at the top and tapering fraudulently toward the bottom. It was the kind of cup which, touched upon the rim by the unwontedly stiff cuff of an embarrassed person, would easily upset, overflow the saucer, and shoot a sudden brown and creamy stream over the table-cloth and into the lap of the best-dressed lady in the room, hostess, schoolmate, and—up to this moment—friend. All this abomination Ranny achieved within the shortest possible time after the cocoa had been placed at his mercy.

There is a kindly provision of nature which draws a curtain of unreality over our worst sufferings. Through such an anesthetic haze Ranny heard the cry of the stricken Josie and saw Mrs. Kendal coming with napkins and words of tact and cheer. He dimly realized that girls were looking upon him as a loathsome thing and that even the boys were no longer laughing. Presently he knew that Josie was being led weeping from the room; he had a vague sense that the collation was passing into a new phase and that in the excitement nobody had thought to refill his cocoa-cup. He had sold his birthright for a mess of pottage only to be cheated out of the pottage.

The next picture that came out of the fog was of Josie, subdued and sorrowful in the garments of anti-

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climax. She took no notice of his existence, but left him free to enjoy a kind of day nightmare in which white islands kept floating down a turbid stream.

At last the refreshments gave out and Ranny was allowed to do his suffering in the sitting-room. "Fatty," nourished and cheerful, went in for pantomime and strolled about, knocking over imaginary cups. He had spilled gallons of cocoa over hundreds of ladies when Ranny came to the conclusion that he could do better for himself elsewhere. He slipped out into the hall and was half-way into his overcoat when Josie appeared, the open door behind her framing eager young faces. Since he was cornered, Ranny thought he might as well live up to Mother's idea of a farewell address.

"Goo'-by, Josie," he said. "I had a *awful* nice time."

It is a social error to tell a lady that you enjoyed pouring beverages upon her best gown. Josie's reply could not have been found in any standard work on etiquette:

"Ranny Dukes, I'll never speak to you again—if I live to be forty years old!"

There was only one retort which a perfect gentleman could make, so Ranny made it.

"I don't care if you *never* do."

In the front row of the delighted audience was

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Tom Rucker; to him Josie, in her ignorance of human nature—or semi-human—appealed for moral support.

“I believe he did it a-purpose. He’s mad at me or something. He never acts nice.”

Ranny’s future hung suspended upon Tom’s reply.

“C’m’ on, Dukes,” said Tom; “le’s git outa this. These here girls makes me tired.”

Into this social crisis sprang Ted Blake in search of his cap.

“You don’t ketch me comin’ to no party again,” he muttered.

“They cry over ev’ry little thing,” was Bud’s indictment, as he struggled with the torn lining of his overcoat sleeve.

The last of the insurgents was “Fatty” Hartman, his face slightly disguised with cake-crumbs. The main business of the meeting being finished, “Fatty” was willing to adjourn.

Josie’s mother arrived belatedly, but was powerless to prevent the walkout—though perhaps her heart was not in her work.

“I had a *awful* nice time,” repeated Ranny, mechanically.

Mrs. Kendal went to look for Josie, who was probably under a bed by now, and compel her to bid her guests good-by. Through the front door, thus unguarded, all the best people leaked out of high society, leaving behind them only girls and such

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drawing-room favorites as Arthur Wilson and Clarence Raleigh.

“He done it a-purpose,” exclaimed Tom, when they were safe outside. “Josie said so her own self. I guess he was a-foolin’ us all the time.”

Ranny had suffered so unjustly from false charges that he felt himself entitled to this excessive praise. He neither affirmed nor denied, but in his bearing there was a distinct suggestion of a rough and dangerous character. Nobody would ever accuse him of being polite to girls again; his name had been washed spotless in a bath of cocoa and cream. It was twilight of St. Valentine’s Day four years before chivalry.

XI

THE BATTLE OF FROGTOWN HARBOR

LAKEVILLE, like that territory of which Cæsar wrote in a deservedly dead language, was divided for educational purposes into three parts. These, in ascending order of importance, were the West Ward, which had nothing but a wooden school-house; the East Ward, which boasted one of brick, but only two stories high; and finally the Center Ward, with its vast three-story brick building and all modern improvements, including a high school and a janitor. Ranny was of that privileged class which attended the Center building. On this balmy Saturday morning, however, he was not doing so, but along with the rest of the rising generation was giving homage to "Frogtown," which was enjoying a spring flood. It was a time of rare prestige for the short street between the railroad and the marsh. The spring rains had swollen the lake, which had "backed up" over the low ground and finally crept up the street and entered people's yards. The transportation system of "Frogtown" now con-

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sisted of a raft and a flat-bottomed boat navigated by the fortunate youth who lived there, while the envious outside world begged rides in exchange for valuable consideration. Ranny, unable for the moment to purchase a position as mariner, was enjoying a quarrel between "Fatty" Hartman and a member of the submerged third who went to the East Ward school.

"We got eight rooms in the Center Ward," said "Fatty," who was one of the leading boasters of Lakeville and environs, "an' a high school, an' a janitor, an' steam-pipes that crack like the dickens."

Tug Wiltshire, the Oriental, made gestures indicating contempt. "Yeah, high school!" he said. "Fellas with high collars, carryin' books for girls!"

"Fatty," who could not deny this accusation, fell back upon the delights of steam heat.

"They go crack, crack, crack!"

"You sound like a duck."

"The Center Ward's three stories high, ain't it?" asked Ranny, argumentatively.

"The Center Ward's got no marsh," said Tug; "the marsh b'longs to the East Ward."

"What's the matter with ya?" "Fatty" now returned to human speech. "The marsh don't belong to nobody."

"I s'pose," Tug said, sarcastically, "a fella don't

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know that b'longs to the Supprise Hose Company! I s'pose he didn't tell me his *own* self."

"What 'd he say?" asked Ranny, somewhat impressed.

"He said like this: the East Ward is by rights the Second Ward. He said the marsh b'longed to the Second Ward—'nd 'Frogtown,' too."

"Are you crazy? Don't the 'Frogtown' fellas go to our school?" This from "Fatty."

"The marsh b'longs to us," said Tug, stubbornly. "If you don't believe it, we'll fight you for it—East-Wards an' Centerses."

"You mean a war?" asked Ranny—"like snow-ball fights or green apples?"

"Not on land," said Tug; "the marsh is all water, ain't it? We gotta have a navy."

"Yea," said Ranny. "Where'd we get a navy?" As a matter of fact, Ranny had a very imperfect idea of what a navy was.

Tug, with the superior wisdom of one who was already past nine, instead of merely eight-going-on-it, knew all there was to know about navies—in fact, owned a book called *With Perry on Lake Erie*. He now told the assembled Center-Warders what little he thought them worthy to know about naval warfare.

"The East-Wards," he concluded, "will come over with a navy nex' Satu'day. We'll show you who owns the marsh!"

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"We c'd lick ya with our eyes shut," said Bud Hicks, another person who was enthusiastic about the Center building—outside of school hours.

"They's a place in our marsh where they's no bottom," said Tug, tantalizingly. "It goes clear down to China."

"How could it?" demanded "Fatty." "The water 'd all run out and drownd the Chinymen."

"Maybe it does sometimes. How'd *you* know? You never been to China."

Ranny's eyes shifted from the desirable inland sea to a "Frogtown" crew which had stopped seafaring to investigate this delightful clamor.

"This kid here," Ranny proclaimed, "says the East Ward owns the marsh an' "Frogtown," an' they'll fight us with boats nex' Satu'day—us Centerses."

"Us Centerses" now constituted themselves a committee on abuse and vituperation, and "Frogtown" promptly succumbed to the interesting idea that the East Ward and its inhabitants should be abolished. It was rather a triumph of diplomacy, for if Tug had first proposed an alliance, no doubt "Frogtown" would just as eagerly have taken up arms against the lordly Center. Educational matters did not interest them in the least; they would not fight and bleed for a three-story brick building and a janitor.

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"All right," one hardy mariner said at last, "but you can't use our navy; you gotta make one yourself."

All proper Center-Warders now repaired, upon invitation, to the barn of Tom Rucker.

"They's lotsa room to make a navy," said Tom; "we 'ain't got no horse now."

At Rucker's barn plans were made and quarreled over, the East Ward was thoroughly denounced, and there were some thrilling, if irrelevant, gymnastics in the haymow. But by noontime, except for Tom's getting the hammer from his father's tool-chest, nothing had actually been accomplished in the way of making the Center Ward mistress of the seas.

At the dinner-table Ranny, without going into needless details, took up the merits of the inter-ward crisis with Father.

"Tug Wil'shire says 'Frogtown' an' the marsh an' ever'thing belongs by rights to the East Ward. That ain't so, is it?"

"Well, yes—kind of," said Father. "You see, Ranny, it's like this. There are three wards for electing councilmen. What you call the East Ward is really the Second Ward; the one in the middle is the First, and the one on the west is the Third. Water Street—you mustn't call it 'Frogtown'—belongs to the Second Ward. So does the marsh, but

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that doesn't matter, because frogs and turtles can't vote."

"But the fellas from 'Frog'—Water Street goes to our school."

"That's because it is too far around the marsh to the East Ward school and it wouldn't be right to make the children swim. They'd get their books wet."

"And their feet," said Mother, dragging in a favorite topic of hers.

This novel method of going to school occupied Ranny's thoughts for a moment to the exclusion of more important questions.

"You see, lots of boys and girls do not go to school in their own wards," Father continued. "Now there's a young fellow I know—let's see, what is his name, now?—well, no matter. He and his family live west of Jefferson Street, so they belong to the Third Ward. But he goes to the Center building because it is nearer. Oh yes, I remember his name now; Dukes—Randolph Harrington Dukes."

"Do we live in the West Ward?" asked Ranny, in dismay.

"Yes, I vote in the Third Ward. But you don't have to go to the West Ward school. Don't worry."

But Ranny *did* worry; not because he doubted Father's assurance that he need not attend the poorest of all possible school-houses, but because his

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pride was shaken and his naval career threatened. He could not understand why his parents had so far forgotten themselves as to live west of Jefferson Street. As he made his way back to the ship-yard after as small a dinner as mother would let him off with, he resolved to defend his shameful secret at all costs.

Other Center-Warders had taken up the geographical question with their elders and had received similar replies. When they found that Tug Wiltshire was right in his contention all parties were very angry at the East Ward. If they had found that Tug was wrong they would have been equally angry. In military matters the rights and the wrongs are of less importance than the we's and the they's.

"Anyhow," said Ranny, "it's where you go to school that counts."

This sentiment was heartily approved, though it did not cover the case of the marsh; if, as Father had said, the turtles and frogs could not vote, neither could their young go to school.

On this Saturday afternoon there was laid down in Rucker's roomy carriage-shed the keel of the largest and only fighting craft that the land-loving Center Ward had ever known. Ted Blake had joined the group and appointed himself manager of construction. "Fatty" Hartman boasted a great deal about what he would personally do to the

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presumptuous Easterners, but did very little actual physical work, owing in part to a certain vagueness as to what a navy was like. Ranny and Tom and such willing but undersized fighters and bleeders were chiefly useful for bringing boards and nails and responding quickly when Ted said, "Hey, hand me that hammer. What's the matter with ya?"

Ted's knowledge of naval construction was founded upon an illustrated book describing the contest of the *Monitor* and the *Merrimac*.

"We gotta have a *Monitor*," he said.

"I'm a monitor in school," Clarence Raleigh suggested, helpfully.

Preparedness was delayed while Ted heaped scorn upon the youth who thought this matter had anything to do with dusting erasers. Ted then explained what a *Monitor* was. There would be a large raft—the largest in Lakeville and probably in the world. In the center there would be a barrel containing sticks and such ammunition. As the throwing of stones was forbidden by the accepted rules of warfare, any stones should be concealed.

"How we gonta make it go?" asked "Fatty."

"We'll push it with poles, you crazy."

Displays of ignorance now ceased and Ted was given his masterful way. It was Ranny, however, who, while searching for nails, made an important discovery.

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"Oh, lookee!" he cried. "We could use 'em for bullets!" He indicated a heap of half-burned carbons from an electric arc-light.

"You can't throw away my carbons; it took me a long time to get 'em," said Tom.

"What do ya use 'em for?" asked Bud Hicks.

As they were of no conceivable value, Tom had to fall back upon the time-honored, "Oh, sumpin'." At this point Ted took enough time from his work to rule that all carbons be requisitioned for war purposes.

When the afternoon had waned and Tom had twice been invited to supper, the *Monitor* presented a tangible form. The outside framework had been laid down, based largely upon the ruin of Mr. Rucker's board-pile. "Fatty" had taken upon himself the task of guarding the door against spying enemies. As no spies had come near, this was pleasant and easy work, well suited to his temperament. He thought it best, however, not to forbid Tom's father from entering his own barn when he came to coerce his son into supper.

"What are you kids making there?" Mr. Rucker asked.

"We're makin' a raft—f'r 'Frogtown,'" said Ted.

"Now, look here, Tom; you can't—" Mr. Rucker had stepped inside the shed and was examining the ambitious structure upon the ground.

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It was a critical moment for the rising young navy, and all the tars fell silent.

"Well," said Mr. Rucker, with a face that seemed to be grave against heavy odds, "don't bung yourselves all up. Skip along home now."

Even Tom did not understand his father's sudden change of attitude. The Center Ward went home to supper with light hearts and high hopes.

At Sunday-school the next day Ranny explained to a youth (who belonged to the lowest order of society and attended the West Ward school) that there was going to be an "awful war nex' Satu'day between the Centerses and the East-Ends."

"Who wants the old marsh?" said this fellow, in the approved sour-grapes formula. "We gotta lake."

This was presumption to which even the Easterners had never risen. The West Ward did abut on the lake, but so did the Center and the East; so did people of every nation and every clime, including farmers. The fact was that the Westerners, deprived of the consolation of a marsh, had made the most of their share in the lake. They swam and fished and rowed boats; when the softer races farther east were venturing timidly upon the pond ice, these hardy Occidentals were skating upon the precarious rim of the lake.

As Miss Binford at this point demanded order,

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Ranny could only say, "Yeah, you gotta wood school-house—that's what you got."

But he hoped more than ever that nobody would discover Jefferson Street's peculiar place in geography.

In the days that followed, navy-building was confined to the late afternoons, owing to the unfortunate necessity of attending, as well as defending, the Center school. Although most of this activity concerned the pupils of Miss Edith Mills, the patriots did not consult with that instructor; the teacher's interest in geography was confined to such remote matters as the course of the Kennebec River and the principle products of Uruguay. Several times there were verbal encounters between representatives of the hostile powers. On Wednesday afternoon Bud Hicks, who had a roving soul, safely penetrated the fastnesses of the Orient and reported that the East-Enders were resurrecting the old sailboat. The pretenders were shoveling mud out of this ancient vessel and patching up its holes. It had long since ceased to have a mast and would have to be propelled by poles or paddles, but it was a veritable dreadnought for size. With this news, work on the *Monitor* went forward with renewed vigor. Meanwhile the high water continued, and "Frogtown" still ruled the wave and its soggy environs. The lowlanders never mentioned the Center Ward in this

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connection, but seemed to proceed on the theory that the marsh belonged to "Frogtown" down to where China began.

The better to conceal his dark secret Ranny worked with great zeal. Positions in the navy were in demand; if his title were proved faulty Ted might give Ranny's place to some taller patriot. And some outspoken person like Bud would surely say:

"Why doncha go to the wood school-house? Ya belong to the Wes' Ward by rights."

But up until Friday night nobody apparently had discovered the skeleton in Ranny's closet. The *Monitor* stood complete, the barrel in the middle filled with legal and illegal ammunition. Ted Blake had chosen the exact spot on the deck at which he was to stand (with feet far apart) and give his commands. Two boy's express-wagons had been requisitioned to take the navy to its ocean at eight the next morning. Everything was in readiness except a slogan—Ted had discovered that it was necessary to have "sumpin' to holler." Ranny proposed his favorite sentiment, "It's where you go to school that counts," but aroused no enthusiasm in Ted's breast. Finally Tom suggested, "*Monitor* forever!" and Ted Blake, on behalf of the Center Ward and civilization generally, accepted this as "sumpin' to holler."

It still lacked a few minutes of eight on the morning of the war when Ranny, having supplied Mother

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with a censored statement of what he intended to do with his holiday, set out for the place of mobilization. It was a glorious morning of balmy breezes and spring sunshine, an ideal day for slaughter and pillage. Under the mental stimulus of great deeds about to be performed, Ranny's short legs twinkled and skipped and now and then treated their owner to a brief run. One of these runs carried him to the entrance of an alley at which three boys appeared with rather startling suddenness. Ranny saw at once that they were neither enemies nor friends, but timid neutrals from the West.

"Nice day for the war?" he said, sociably.

For answer Ranny was seized and pulled into the alley. There, while one timid neutral on each side held an arm and attempted to control a leg, the third tied a handkerchief over his eyes. Ranny's hands were then fastened behind him and he was requested in a hoarse, unnatural voice to "Come along now and don't git smart."

"Wha's the matter with you?" Ranny asked. "You kids ain't in this war."

Ranny was informed that persons who did not obey invariably died in "horbulagony." An unmilitary snicker from one of his captors mitigated the force of this threat; but he was intimidated into silence by that long and unfamiliar word. After a long journey he was led through a gate, felt soft grass

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underfoot, and was permitted to stumble over a sill. A brand-new voice asked him for the counter-sign.

When his bandage was removed he found himself in a dim and unfamiliar barn surrounded by Westerners who threatened him with lath swords. One of his captors whispered in the sentry's ear, and Ranny was requested to climb a ladder. At the top of the ladder he found an inclosure banked high with hay.

"Crawl into that there hole," said his escort. "We can't stand here all day!"

It is one thing to make a tunnel in a haymow and traverse it at will, but it is quite another to enter a totally unfamiliar tunnel in an alien barn. Thus at the very moment when Ranny should have been helping to move a navy he was crawling painfully through a pitch-dark hole, followed by a person with a tendency to jab, and going to some unknown fate. The choky blackness removed what little heart Ranny had left.

It was with vast relief that he at last saw faint daylight ahead. As he crept out of the hole he was jerked to a standing position by the proper authorities and hustled toward injustice at the lighter end of the hay-loft. The important personage who sat there was a stranger to Ranny, but it was evident that he was a monarch of some sort, for he sat upon

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a throne composed of a small box placed upon a larger one, he wore a pasteboard crown and brandished a scepter, which in humbler days had been part of a broom. This autocrat was several sizes larger than Ranny. He was as dark as a pirate. Beneath the trappings of royalty there was something vaguely familiar in his face and figure. When he spoke it was in that gruff, impersonal voice so common among potentates:

“Wha’s the charge ag’in’st this here pris’ner?”

“He said,” reported one of the guards, “the Wes’ Ward only had a wood school-house.”

His Majesty rumbled and kicked the throne.

“An’ he said the Wes’ Ward didn’t own the lake.”

“When did he say that?”

“He said it las’ Sunday in Sunday-school, ‘Butch.’”

The monarch brandished his scepter, not at Ranny, but at the witness. “Don’t git fresh with the king!”

The varlet’s ill-advised remark solved the problem which had been troubling Ranny ever since he had entered the Presence. He thrilled a little at the revelation. This, then, was “Butch” Willet, heir of Willet’s meat-market, and known far and wide as the bully of the West End. He had been pointed out to Ranny one day on the lake skating far beyond his fellows, way out toward open water. His name was a commonplace, yet Ranny had never seen him at close range. “Butch” had never wasted much

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time upon the effete civilizations farther east; therefore he had become a tradition, an amazingly straight-throwing, hard-hitting, long-winded boy, an amphibious animal, a prodigious swimmer and skater. And it was generally admitted that he ate raw meat at his father's emporium.

"Lemme go, 'Butch,'" said Ranny, sullenly. "I gotta go to the war."

"Lookie here, young fella," said the monarch, "if you want to go to the war, you gotta go with the Wes'-Wards. You live west of Jefferson Street, don't you? Answer me that."

"The Wes' Ward ain't in this war."

"Listen to that, would you?" said the king to his court. "Oh no, not at all. Proba'ly nobody can't have a war except the Centerses."

"The Centerses thinks they're smart," said a flunky.

"I won't fight against the Centerses," said Ranny. "It's where you go to school that counts."

"Is the dungeon ready?" asked the king.

A dungeon specialist replied that all was prepared, including "horbulagony." Of course no person wants to go to jail and miss a war, so what could Ranny do but agree to go with his captors? A few minutes later the king and his cohorts, with their prisoner carefully guarded, took their way lakeward, Ranny, angry and disappointed, chagrined

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that his West-Wardism had become public property, but under it all yielding a grudging admiration for the scientific way he was being mistreated.

At the shore they were welcomed by a body of fighters and bleeders equal in numbers to their own. Three rowboats were filled with throwable sticks. Every jolly tar had a lath sword in his belt and carried a life-like wooden gun. Ranny's admiration for his captors arose another notch.

The fleet was soon under way, Ranny in the flagship with the king, who, by changing his crown for a cap, had now become an admiral. As the navy sped along the coast its commander cleared up a few points that were hazy to the prisoner. It seemed that "Butch" had made speech with Tug Wiltshire and had agreed to aid in the laudable enterprise of removing the Center Ward from the map. The West Ward expected every man, including prisoner, to do his duty. Ranny's capture had been a challenge to the arrogance of the lordly Centerses; any misconduct on his part would be dealt with by means of marlinspikes and belaying-pins. While they were navigating the shoal that separated the lake from the marsh "Butch" was pointing out the disadvantages of walking the plank.

"Butch" now rose to his impressive four-feet-three.

"Hardaport, you lubbers!" he cried, pointing

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toward "Frogtown" harbor in order to make his meaning perfectly clear.

The first thing that caught Ranny's anxious eye was the East Ward dreadnought well in toward shore and bristling with belligerents. Soon he saw the raft and flat-bottomed boat of the lowlanders vigorously defending their altars and their fires. But where was the *Monitor*?

Where *was* the *Monitor*? Ranny's hope that it was hiding behind the dreadnought was dispelled when he discovered Ted Blake and his command standing on the shore, trying to bombard the Easterners with sticks, shouting, "*Monitor* forever!" but not stating where it might be found. Had Mr. Rucker at the last minute refused to allow them to bring the navy?

As they drew into the harbor Ranny saw a moving picture of defeat. "Fatty" Hartman was attempting to launch what looked like an abandoned cellar door, but the minute it struck the water it was occupied by eager mariners, and sank with universal feet-wetting. "Frogtown's" fight was valiant, but hopeless. The dreadnought was creeping steadily toward shore—and here were reinforcements to turn defeat into slaughter.

With an impulse that was three parts anger and one sheer desperation Ranny arose and hurled a stick at the dreadnought. It was a little stick, ragged

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and water-soaked, but it changed the course of history.

Ranny aimed at the East Ward in general, but what, by some miraculous chance, he hit was the left ear of the inventor of naval warfare. Tug, cut off in the midst of an important command, turned in surprise to the flag-ship.

"Hey! What's the matter with you, 'Butch'?" he demanded. "You're on our side."

One of Tug's retainers fired an unauthorized shot in return. The stick bounded off of the knee of a Very Exalted Personage. In that instant the unnatural alliance between the East and the West was dissolved.

"Give 'em one, men!" shouted Admiral "Butch." The flag-ship responded with a shower of sticks and the play-boys of the western world were soon closing in upon the unwieldy craft. That is, two of the three boats were closing in; the third, not yet aware of its country's change of policy, was exchanging missiles and insults with the "Frogtowners." For a few moments the world was presented with the confusing spectacle of one navy fighting on opposite sides of the same war; but presently the admiral put a stop to this illogical slaughter and summoned all patriots against the dreadnought. Soon the lighter vessels had it completely surrounded.

Admiral "Butch," well versed in the literature of

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piracy, now ordered his vassals to board her and at the cost of a few bruised fingers and one splash in the shallow water this was accomplished, Ranny being among the first invaders. Meanwhile the Center Ward shore batteries had located the dreadnought with the long-range Rucker carbons and were inflicting slight but impartial damage upon friend and foe. It is a curious fact that the only missile which actually struck Ranny during the engagement was one of those carbons which he had himself discovered.

Admiral "Butch" now demanded that Tug and his crew surrender; this they naturally refused to do.

"You said you was comin' here to help *us*!" Tug shouted.

"Yeah, help you! Why did you sling at me?"

This argument never reached its logical conclusion in a personal encounter between the two commanders, for at that moment the dreadnought, which had been leaking increasingly during the engagement, now, under the weight of the buccaneers began to sink, the water pouring through its bottom in little geysers. It required the combined efforts of the mariners of all nations to run the craft close to the shore where its old bones could rest comfortably upon the mud and to get its occupants safe to dry land.

This event was regarded by the Westerners as equivalent to surrender. On the strength of it

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they claimed all territory in sight. The Far East declared the proceedings null and void because King "Butch" had gone back upon his royal word. The Center Ward boosters proved to the satisfaction of one another that if they had only got their navy there they would have defeated all comers, and therefore the marsh, as always, belonged to them. The "Frogstown" tars, having no interest in political discussion, swarmed upon the sunken craft and marked it for their own. Thus, happily, the war had not settled anything, and it would be necessary to have another one next Saturday, weather permitting.

Because of the fortunate turn of affairs, Ranny could now meet his old commander without shame.

"Wha's the matter with the *Monitor*?" he asked. "Why didn't you bring it?"

"Aw," said Ted Blake, "they made it too big. They couldn't get it outa the barn."

"You was bossin' everything," said Tom Rucker, hotly. "You thought you was smart. If it hadn't been for Ranny bringin' help, them East-Wards would won."

"If I could only got my boat a-floatin'," said "Fatty," "I'd 'a' showed 'em." This ridiculous remark restored everybody to good humor.

The Westerners having, by their own admission, added a vast amount of subaqueous territory to their realm, now embarked for home, Admiral

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"Butch" standing up in the boat in that commanding, perilous way in which Washington is supposed to have crossed the Delaware. They made a brave appearance as they sped away, the three boats racing side by side, bristling with black gun-barrels and waving swords.

"Them guns wouldn't shoot," said Bud Hicks, but with ill-concealed admiration.

"They got the best navy of all," said Tom. "Howja come to be with 'em, Ranny?"

"By rights," said Ranny, proudly, "I *belong* to the Wes' Ward."

XII

THE WAY OF THE REFORMER

THE boyhood of Lakeville trooped through the changing seasons in close formation; it had no use for advance-guards, no sympathy for stragglers. When society decreed that it was time to bounce hard-rubber balls upon sidewalks, all the world went a-bouncing—until potato-shooters came in and made bouncing ridiculous. A nameless paper device that produced a valuable noise, a button buzzing on strings, a willow whistle, each strutted and fretted its hour upon the stage, then jackstones became the rage, subject to change without notice. At early frost-time when the air was blue and pungent with burning leaves all the best people wore walnut stains upon their fingers. A dry place upon the bare ground, a knuckle-warming sun, and a shop-window display mixed in the crucible of spring, and suddenly it could be seen that daylight was made for marbles. Now it was a matter of social solidarity to be lumpy in contour and to rattle when you walked.

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Ranny was three days overdue as a marble fiend, and was beginning to feel like a fossil when, on an April Saturday morning of mellow breezes, he came into money. Ordinarily Ranny did not spend his weekly dime at once, but by dribbling it into his interior sometimes made it last until well toward noon. To-day, however, as he advanced along the sidewalk by an elaborate system of hops and skips—a method of locomotion of his own discovery—he had bolder and nobler plans.

Presently he met Tom Rucker, who was indulging in the solitary pleasure of kicking a tin can along the walk. Tom was, of all persons, the one whom Ranny most desired to see, but the coincidence need not appear striking, as they were on the way to each other's home.

“'Lo, Tom!” said Ranny, giving the can a sociable kick.

“Did ya git it?” asked Tom.

Ranny displayed two nickels. “Come on to Mis' Leonard's,” he said.

“Aw, Mis' Leonard's is no good f'r marbles. Le's go down-town. Ya git more.”

It was a tragic fact, frequently mentioned to customers by the perennially tearful Mrs. Leonard, that she could not compete with the larger stores down-town. Her little shop in the residence district was an economic error living precariously upon the

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bad memories of adults and the temptation of youth. As Ranny had no prejudice in her favor, the tin can was now belabored toward the busier marts of trade and was soon abandoned in favor of a hitch on the back of Alleston's delivery-wagon. The two boys rode almost a block before they were discovered and chased off.

Tom Rucker, connoisseur and collector of marbles, led his friend to the completest stock in Lakeville and gave out free advice in the purchase, producing from his own pocket examples of what heights of excellence marbles can reach. They examined hypercritically a number of cornelians, although both knew that Ranny was in no position to buy such luxuries. Finally they settled upon a glassy as a shooter and a line of aggies, commies, and white alleys. The commies were the cheapest of all, due in part to the fact that these dabs of brown clay were not entirely round. They were useful, Tom explained, for playing keeps because it was almost a pleasure to lose a few of them.

"One time," said Tom, as they proceeded toward a favorite gaming-place, "I saw two big fellas playin' keeps f'r canelias."

"It's gamblin' to play keeps f'r canelias."

This phase of the subject did not excite Tom.

"They c'd stand up like this and plunk 'em." Tom made gestures as of one plunking.

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“One time I saw a great big man playin’ marbles. He had a mustache an’ ever’thing”—reminiscences by Ranny.

“Ladies always steps on the ring and their dress spoils everything,” was Tom’s indictment.

By a perfect understanding the two marble fiends turned their faces toward the brick church. They both attended Sunday-school there, but it was not dogmatism that now led them thither; the brick church provided the best gaming facilities of all institutions in town, religious or secular. There was a vacant lot back of the church which, for topographical reasons, was the first place to get dry in the spring. There was no fence around it, yet it was safe from feminine skirts, the bane of sidewalk playing. The brick church had no regular janitor like the Center school; the man who came on Saturday to sweep and dust had a deep prejudice against persons who attended church and tracked in dirt, but no feeling at all toward those who merely used the back yard. He did not have to sweep the back yard. As a consequence the brick church was unconsciously carrying on a flourishing institutional work with boys.

When Ranny and Tom reached this place of unbigoted entertainment they found a wide choice of activities and racket of a high character. Pairs of young citizens were competing for commies in small

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oval rings scratched in the ground. Two squares, each about the size of an elementary geography, were providing profit and loss to groups of four. Also there was a game of purgatory, a series of holes in the ground like a microscopic golf-course.

“Le’s play by our own self,” said Ranny. Not yet an expert, he preferred the shallow waters of Tom Rucker to the depths of general society. Tom readily consented and they provided themselves with one of the oval rings.

The two-handed game was a continuous performance; when one contestant knocked a marble from the ring the other had to supply the loss from his pocket. Theoretically the game had no end; practically it ran until one player had lost all his capital or until the affair broke up in a dispute over whether the shooter committed the crime of hunching. Ranny did not know the rules well enough to violate them, so he went on doggedly digging up fresh capital until his resources were severely strained. He made no complaint, showed no sign of distress, but played carefully with the aid of his tongue, the corners of his mouth, and his nose. At last the hand that emerged from his pocket brought up nothing but a piece of chalk.

“I ’ain’t got nothin’ left but my shooter,” he said. “I gotta quit.”

Tom Rucker’s friendship had survived repeated

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tests, and yet it had never reached the heights of which it was capable. What Tom did now was a revelation in boy's humanity to boy.

"We wasn't playin' keeps," he said. "I kep' 'em all in a differ'nt pocket."

"Aw right," said the amazed Ranny, stowing away the recovered marbles. "I thought we was playin' keeps." It is, of course, not good form to express thanks in any way.

Bud Hicks now entered the palace of pleasure, rattling his assets ostentatiously.

"Come on, le's have a square game," he said.

Tom agreed eagerly, Ranny scarcely less so, and Ted Blake, who had the boastful talk and the cracked knuckles of the experienced marble-player, made a fourth.

This was keeps for some people, but it was not keeps for Randolph Harrington Dukes. When the dinner-whistle blew in Father's wagon-factory Ranny left for home with nothing but his glassy. The only way to lose a shooter is to have a hole in your pocket. Otherwise he was no better off at this hour than if he had, as usual, poured his ten cents into the alimentary canal.

Tom accompanied his friend as far as the store corner. In order that the time devoted to travel might not be wasted they played the walking game, shooting alternately at each other's marble. It was

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owing to this glacial system of transportation that so many people were late to meals in those days.

"When ya learn to play a little better," said Tom, "you an' me c'n be pardners."

"Aw right," said Ranny.

"Come on over 'safternoon. We c'n play in the back yard—jes' fun, ya know."

"I'd jes' as leave."

To be a marble partner of Tom's was an alluring prospect. Marble partnerships were a common phenomenon in Lakeville, two players pooling their resources and dividing their profits. That there were no advantages whatever in the arrangement did not prevent its continuing—as an institution. Such alliances never survived a period of adversity because of the well-known law that failure is inevitably due to the lack of ability of one's partner.

The afternoon passed in patient effort, varied with some imaginary seamanship in the dreadnought in the barn. Once the scene shifted to Ranny's house, where a start was made in putting the Dukes-Rucker Drug Company on its feet for the summer, the cold weather having wrought devastation among the liquids.

The next day they met again, but this time in the restraining garments of Sunday-school. Tom was humorous, Andrew wore a red bow-tie, and the teacher was late; everything was as usual and there

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was no sign of impending trouble. But at class-time Miss Binford twisted the lesson story about in such a way as to get a moral precept out of it.

"We must be good boys and always do what is right," she said. "We must not drink or smoke or gamble."

"It's gambling to play marbles for keeps," said Andrew, who was always currying favor with the teacher.

"Yes, Andrew, that is true. It is not wrong to play marbles, but we must never play for keeps; that is gambling, and leads to other bad habits. Many a man who leads a life of crime began by playing marbles for keeps."

Miss Binford did not support this charge with actual examples, but the bare statement fell upon Ranny like a blanket of dismay. He had played marbles for keeps only the day before, just outside that colored window; he intended, if all went well, to make something of an industry of it. He had heard that it was gambling to play keeps, but had never given the report credence except in the case of cornelians and possibly moss agates. Now here was an authority on wickedness affirming that he, Tom, Bud Hicks, Ted Blake, and everybody of consequence were headed for a career of crime. The thought of Ted Blake made the monstrous thing seem probable.

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After Sunday-school Ranny slipped away without Tom, a thing which he had not done for months, and took up the matter with Father.

"The teacher says it's gamblin' to play keeps."

A moment of silence gave birth to a hope that Father might take issue with Miss Binford. Certainly Father had never mentioned the matter before.

"Yes, Ranny," he said, "I suppose it is. Why? Have you been winning anybody's marbles?"

"No," Ranny replied, truthfully.

"Has anybody been winning yours?"

"Yes—a little."

"Well, I guess it isn't gambling to lose marbles," Father said, with a smile. "But if I were you I wouldn't play for keeps. It's just as much fun the other way, especially for people who can't shoot very straight."

A load was lifted from Ranny's conscience when he learned that he had not as yet started upon a career of crime. He would go to Tom to-morrow and explain that the partnership was dissolved in favor of some stainless pursuit like running a drug-store; Tom would understand, because he was of the brick-church faith.

But at the noon hour the next day Tom was cold in demeanor.

"Why did ya run off home yeste'day?" he asked. "Are ya mad at me?"

RANNY

“It ain’t right to play keeps,” replied Ranny, with characteristic directness. “It’s gamblin’. Le’s don’t be pardners in marbles—only drug-stores and things.”

“Aw, wha’s the matter with ya? It ain’t gamblin’ to play f’r commies an’ aggies an’ white alleys. Everybody plays keeps. Ya played keeps y’r *own* self Satu’day.”

“I didn’t win any marbles,” said Ranny, with retroactive virtue.

“No. Good reason.”

“Miss Binford said it’s gamblin’ to play keeps, didn’t she? Are you deaf, or what?”

“What’s *she* know about marbles? I bet she’d think a aggie was a canelia.”

“She would not!”

“She would, too!”

“Would not!”

There was fist-clenching that came to nothing, but the merits of the case were completely lost in personalities. Ranny predicted for his recent friend a life behind prison bars; Tom put forth the unwarranted view that Ranny was a sissy and a poor marble-player and—the universal lot of the uplifter—that he thought he was smart.

Thus they parted. It is a curious fact that a friendship which had weathered many real storms finally came to grief over the question of whether or

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not Miss Binford would think an agate was a cornelian.

It was a weak issue with which to go before the public. Persons who were total strangers to the Sunday-school teacher in question promptly conceded her dense ignorance. Consequently Ranny went home without the aid of his patent hop and skip. He was angry and distressed, but not remorseful. Rather he felt that he had escaped from the society of criminals just in time.

His fame as an enemy of personal liberty spread, and when he approached the brick-church Monte Carlo after school he was met with ridicule. "Fatty" Hartman addressed him in his patent falsetto. Bud Hicks was less subtle in his methods.

"Go home," he said, "and tell y'r mother she wants ya."

Tom Rucker took no part in these hostilities, but there was a triumphant grin among his freckles. Ranny backed slowly away; this, obviously, was not a profitable way to dispose of one's time.

"Come on, Ranny; let's go to my house. It is wrong to play keeps. My mother says so."

It was a sign of the depths to which his prestige had fallen that the only voice that was raised in his defense was that of Clarence Raleigh.

"All right," said Ranny, without enthusiasm. "They can go to prison f'r all I care."

RANNY

"My father," said Clarence, when the uproar had been left behind, "would buy me all the marbles in town if I wanted them, but it isn't right to gamble—or swear."

"Or chew tobacco," added Ranny, helpfully.

"My father buys me everything. I got an auto-wagon and iron stuff to build bridges and things and an electric train. And I've got more track than anybody in town."

Ranny began to see possibilities in this hitherto neglected youth who could wallow in marbles if he but said the word. He began to feel that virtue was about to receive a prompt reward. He had seen the auto-wagon in front of the store which had it for sale and had spoken highly of it to Father. Also he longed to get his fingers into that structural iron.

When they reached the ambitious Raleigh home they exercised the motor-car briefly upon the front sidewalk—that is, Clarence exercised it, and when it came Ranny's turn suggested that they play something else. The guest knew his rights, but waived them because he was anxious to see the erector.

"We'd have to play it in the house," said Clarence; "we'd get all dirty on the porch and probably lose things."

Ranny prepared himself for the ordeal of meeting adults.

THE WAY OF THE REFORMER

“Ranny Dukes has come to play with me, mother,” Clarence said, by way of introduction. “We want to play with the building thing.”

Mrs. Raleigh, a stately lady of considerable girth, gave Ranny a critical examination, and somehow conveyed the impression that he was passed by a narrow margin.

“Very well,” she said. “See that you wipe your feet—both of you.”

The mechanical erector proved a bewildering delight of steel pieces and screws. For ten minutes or more, barring a tendency on Clarence’s part to grab, the two highly moral youths got on very well. But just as Ranny had his plans laid for an ambitious jail that would, by a charming little conceit, contain all of his former acquaintances, Clarence lost interest in architecture and transportation and life in general. For the first time in history Ranny became obsessed with the idea that perhaps he had better go home. Mrs. Raleigh made no objection, only stipulating that nobody was to bang the door.

At the supper-table Ranny gave his parents a hint as to the social changes of the day.

“I played with Clarence Raleigh ’safternoon,” he said, apropos of nothing.

“He is a good boy,” Mother said.

This was solid ground.

“Yes, he don’t swear or gamble or anything.”

RANNY

"Do you mean he doesn't do anything at all?" Father's remark was too near the truth to be a successful jest.

Ranny searched his mind for virtues that might be tacked upon his new playmate—not cleanliness or politeness, because Mother had an exaggerated idea of these things already. Clarence was taking violin lessons, but this secret, also, was safe in Ranny's hands. In the end he had to fall back upon worldly goods.

"He's got lotsa nice things—a auto-wagon, an' a 'lectric train (only I didn't see it yet), an' one of them building things of iron. If he wanted 'em he could have all the marbles in Lakeville. His father gets him ever'thing he wants."

"Now look here, son," said Father. "A boy doesn't have any more fun because he has expensive toys. I'll bet Tom Rucker can do more things with a couple of boards and nails than Clarence can with all his high-class blocks."

"They ain't blocks." Ranny was driven to technical quibbles. "They're made of iron and you put 'em together with screws."

"Well—whatever they are—can Clarence make anything with them? Is he any good?"

"He's a good *boy*," said Ranny, desperately.

Herein lay the weakness of the new alliance, the reason why the week dragged. Being good was a fine

THE WAY OF THE REFORMER

thing, but it did not solve the problem of what to do with one's afternoons. Day after day he saw vice rampant and joyous back of the brick church and virtue hideous at the Raleigh homestead. He began to suspect that when everybody was in prison except himself and Clarence life was going to be a rather drab affair. Clarence was a good boy, but as a companion he was a total failure, coveting everything, enjoying nothing. He could not throw straight like Bud Hicks or wiggle his ears like Tom or bunch up his muscle like Ted Blake. His marble-playing was worse than a girl's; if his father *had* bought him all the marbles in Lakeville what would he have done with them? He knew no more about aggies than Miss—than Tom said Miss Binford did.

In despair Ranny made an effort to get Clarence off his own ground, in fact, offered to organize the Dukes-Raleigh Drug and Guinea-pig Company. But Clarence's mother forbade him to go beyond the front sidewalk; apparently his virtue was of the fragile kind that could not be trusted in public.

The end came on Friday afternoon. Clarence had got out the auto-wagon and, in accordance with the best Raleigh traditions, was taking the first ride and prolonging it unduly. Ranny thought of the school-free Saturday impending, and was very low in his mind.

"I tell you what le's do—" said Clarence at last.

RANNY

"I tell *you* what le's do. Le's give me a ride." With these words Ranny pushed his host out of the wagon and took his place.

Clarence made a weak effort to recover the vehicle. "I guess it's my wagon," he said. "I'll tell my mother."

There was a soft-looking place just above Clarence's uselessly white collar that Ranny had for days felt a growing desire to pinch. He attained this ambition without ceasing to be a chauffeur. Clarence, with bitter cries, started for the house.

Ranny sat as one enthralled; it was the most delightful sound he had heard for nearly a week. Presently he realized that he was being addressed by an angry adult.

"Get right out of that, Ranny Dukes," said Mrs. Raleigh, "and go home! We don't want bad boys around here, fighting and abusing Clarence."

The accused lost his taste for motoring, for Raleighs of all sizes, and for virtue in general. He had spent the most miserably moral week of his life, with the result that he was being chased home as a bad boy. When he reached the "secret den" he resolved that in the morning bright and early he would take his glassy and his ten cents and plunge into iniquity. He would make his peace with the wicked and unselfish Tom and they would take the joyful downward road together.



HE WOULD TAKE HIS GLASSY AND HIS TEN CENTS AND PLUNGE INTO INIQUITY



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The exclusive hop and skip was put into service again as Ranny set forth the next morning upon his criminal career. Being in a hurry to fall from grace, he spent his dime to poor advantage at the uneconomic Mrs. Leonard's—nine cents for marbles and one for two caramels. With a cheek stretched in a pleasantly lumpy way, with one piece of candy in his pocket, and noisy with commies, he approached the place of religious instruction and unconfined joy. A shout of derision greeted his appearance.

"Where's Clarence?" asked "Fatty," in the classic falsetto. "Wouldn't mamma let him come?"

There was only one person who did not join in these atrocities. Tom Rucker looked at the approaching reformer, flushed slightly as one caught red-handed, and to Ranny's amazement pushed his shooter into his pocket. Then Tom's voice rang out in a cry that had not been heard in Lakeville for many dreary months:

"Round ball—ins!"

"Ins!" echoed Ted Blake.

"Catcher!" "Pitcher!" "First base!" These cries from different boys followed in such quick succession that before Ranny realized what was happening he had to take an ignominious place in left field.

"It's purty dry back of the pickle-works," shouted Tom. "I saw it this morning. Come on, Ranny."

RANNY

Ranny shyly pushed his peace-offering into Tom's hand.

A career of crime was blasted in its infancy. A greater reformer than Ranny, the springtime sun, had dried out the ball-field and abolished gambling. Uproar and outrage and the joy of living would henceforth be found back of the pickle-works.

XIII

A TAME HERO

IN the open space back of the pickle-works baseball was evolved out of primeval chaos whenever the weather and the educational system permitted. The first comer, if he had a ball, bounced it against the cucumber-shed or let it roll pleasantly off the slanting roof. The next sterling athlete joined him in catch—either plain catch or that fascinating gamble called, for some reason, “ante over”—the ball being tossed back and forth over the shed, alternately arriving out of mystery and disappearing into the unknown. As soon as a bat arrived there was knocking up of flies, and presently that onward and upward movement, one o’ cat, two o’ cat, and round ball. Round ball was a semi-civilized diversion in which the fielding positions were determined by lung power. It held within it the germs of its own dissolution; its very loudness attracted its executioners. When the eighth boy came it was doomed, with the tenth the poor wabbly thing passed away unmourned and choosing-up ensued. The

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visible world was now divided into the "us's" and the "thems," new antagonisms and solidarities were formed, class was arrayed against class—and baseball burst into bloom. That perfect thing which it cost the world generations of leisure and culture to produce, these heirs of the ages often achieved in half an hour.

On that mellow May Saturday which was destined to have such an important place in his private history Ranny arrived at the scene of disorder when life was in its round-ball or barbaric stage. He accepted a position in the outfield—the fate of the new-comer—and prepared to rise upon other people's dead selves toward the home-plate and social prestige. As a fielder he cut no brave figure. The only ball which came his way did so at a time when he was lost in admiration of "Sausage" Buckley's dog. The ball rolled far beyond him into a vague region of burdocks and thistles, and he was pretty thoroughly reviled before he got it back.

Ranny was doomed never to break into the exclusive society of the infield, for presently there came a breach of the so-called peace from beyond the cannery building and the cry: "Choose up! choose up!" This hullabaloo was followed shortly by its author, Ted Blake, who, as he rounded the corner of the shed, elected himself captain and pitcher of one of the teams. Bud Hicks, who had possession

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of the ball in this crisis, became the other captain, and choosing-up followed with the aid of the ball-bat and all the recognized forms of chicanery. The outcome was that Ted found himself at the end facing the possibility of taking Ranny upon his team. He made a brief survey of the forces behind him.

"I don't need no outfielder," he said. "They'll be lucky if they hit the ball at all."

"I don't need none, either," said Bud Hicks, who, against the unanimous advice of his team, had appointed himself pitcher.

Ranny was therefore invited to be the keeper of the score and of the collection of valuables. The former was kept on the ground with a sharp stick and the latter in a cap—an unimpressive array of losables, including two knives, some gaudy but not neat jewelry that came with candy, and Tom Rucker's imitation watch, by which it was always twenty minutes after eight. Ranny, deeply hurt, declined this doubly responsible position and withdrew to the shadow of the shed, where he sat on a board and refused to associate with the team which was having its innings.

"I guess he thinks we're playin' wood-tag," said Ted Blake, whose followers laughed loyally.

If Ranny had owned a good ball or a mask he could have bought his way into the game, but he had no more capital than skill. As a ball-player

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he was much like that luckless recruit to the Lakeville team of whom the *Bulletin* said, "Though a poor fielder, he is remarkably weak at the bat." As he sat there and watched Ted's elaborate imitation of the wind-up of Robby Ryan, Lakeville's permanent pride, he wondered whether it was not time he achieved some proficiency in this important phase of human life. He was nearing his ninth birthday and was getting older every hour; yet it was a popular superstition that he could not hit, catch, or throw. As he sat there his only comfort was that Ted Blake's well-intentioned offerings were being batted into all unoccupied parts of the field. The Hicks contingent was almost powerless with merri-ment.

Suddenly an unaccountable hush fell over the face of nature. It was like the instant of awful silence in the circus before the extra double somersault which has never before been achieved in any of our leading hemispheres. Yet it also had elements of resemblance to the moment last summer when the United States Senator arose to add to the sum of human knowledge. The Bud Hicks rejoicers subsided into respectful silence. "Fatty" Hartman, who was catching for the "Blakes'," began striking poses; and Ted himself, who had been pitching with zeal, if not success, laughed sheepishly as one caught playing with children. Ted was one of those

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disgusting youths who morally desert their own class at the sight of an adult.

From where he sat, Ranny could not make out the cause of this astonishing conduct, but presently it rounded the shed and revealed itself to the eye. Moreover, it joined Ranny upon his board, clasped its large, freckled hands about its knees, tilted its hat over its forehead, and leaned its fiery head against the building as if with intent to commit arson. Then it spoke.

“How’s come *you* ain’t playin’?”

Ranny was stricken with stage-fright. “Aw—I don’t know—I don’t wanta very much—they think they’re smart.”

“Not good enough for them, huh?” The man watched for a moment the travesty of the national game. Ted was bitterly accusing his team of non-support. “Must be pretty bad.”

One could afford to be modest in this distinguished company.

“I ain’t so very good yit, Mr. Ryan,” he said.

“What’s your name?”

“Randolph Harrington Dukes.” This was the formula used for adults, but he added, “Most generally they call me Ranny.”

“Father own the wagon-factory?”

“Yes, Mr. Ryan.”

“Most generally my friends call me Robby.”

RANNY

"Yes—yes, sir," said Ranny. His universe was beginning to spin and it was hard work managing the business of conversation. The companions of his lost youth were continuing to go through the motions of baseball. Robby Ryan said that he had been about a good deal, but he had never seen a worse exhibition of pitching than Ted Blake was putting up.

"He wouldn't let me play," said Ranny.

"Come down to the rest'rant 'safternoon 'bout three o'clock and we'll toss a few. How 'bout it?"

"All right, Mis—R—Robby. I'd just as leave."

"Don't tell the other kids. We don't want a gang around."

Ranny went into a state of coma, but presently was conscious of the fact that his visitor was translating himself elsewhere. As soon as he was gone the boys, taking advantage of a dispute as to whose turn it was to look for the ball among the burdocks, crowded about and asked for the particulars.

"What 'd he say?" asked Ted Blake.

It is seldom that Nemesis comes as swiftly as it came to Ted Blake that sunshiny day back of the pickle-works.

"He said he never seen such rotten pitchin'. Neither did I," Ranny added, as he arose to take his leave. One who has sat upon the same plank with greatness and leaned against the same cucumber-

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shed cannot be too careful in his choice of associates. And since parents have a distorted view of such matters Ranny did not tell his family at dinner-time what had come into his life. Father might feel the honor keenly, but Mother would be afraid he would get hurt.

“Robin Redbreast” Ryan—so called by the *Bulletin* in expansive moments, but by the population more often named Robby than Reddy—was, like the bird whose name he honored, a summer resident.

In fact there was something cosmic about Robby. People planted radishes by him when he turned up in the spring and when, at the end of the season, his glowing head disappeared from Main Street, leaves dropped off of trees. Whenever he came, a position of honor and profit was awaiting him at the White Front Restaurant. The proprietor combined business with patriotism by installing Robby behind his counter, insuring to Lakeville the services of a man who was vaguely known as “the best pitcher in this part of the State,” and to himself the patronage of the younger sporting set. For every dime that Robby took in over the lunch-counter he gave value received in edibles with baseball conversation as a premium. In the evening the place was crowded with earnest students of history; with Robby they went on little round trips through the ages from “Pop” Anson to Alexander the Greatest. The air

R A N N Y

was full of batting averages and indignation over umpires. A versatile man was Robby Ryan. The hand which he could wrap around a dollar-and-a-quarter ball like a red blanket could slide a plate of huckleberry pie half the length of the counter and make it stop square in front of its ultimate consumer.

In a boy's-eye view the name of Robby Ryan would have come somewhere between those of Buf-falo Bill and Benjamin Franklin, the prominent kite-flyer. Men knew that Robby was not the master he had been in his first youth, but boys are as reluctant to change their gods as to change their clothes. It was firmly believed that he was once a pitcher in a major-league team—though under an assumed name. It was common knowledge that he had an “up-shoot” in his repertoire, but he never used it because his “out drop” was enough to baffle any merely human batter. The boys' awe of him was made perfect by the fact that he never spoke to any of them. It is true that Bud Hicks claimed that the great man had once said, “Hello, kidlet,” but, although Bud pointed out the exact spot in the solar system where this occurred, the report was not given credence. Boys were not patrons of restaurants, nor, in the lucrative sense, of baseball games. It was not reasonable to suppose that this master of two noble professions would ever speak respectfully to anybody under fourteen.

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It was therefore a transformed Ranny, outwardly calm so as not to attract a crowd, but with a thumping heart, who draped himself upon an iron railing near the White Front Restaurant at two, and who thereafter went down to the corner every five minutes to look at the court-house clock. He had often pointed out to Father the importance of having a watch and here was proof of his contention. On the stroke of three he entered the restaurant. Robby greeted him in a coldly impersonal way as if he had come to buy a dime's worth of boiled ham.

"Hello, R-Robby," said Ranny, with a sinking heart. "You said—m-mebbe— You know—three o'clock. I thought mebbe—"

"Oh, it's Ranny," said "Three R," who hated to see anybody suffer. "Sit down there. I'll be with you as soon as the boss comes in." Exactly as one man of the world to another!

The proprietor arrived shortly and relieved Ryan from the trifling duties of mid-afternoon.

"Well," said the pitcher, removing a ball and glove from behind the water-cooler, "now we'll see how the ol' wing is feelin'. I guess I'll have to go easy to-day."

They went back through the kitchen and established themselves in a comparatively open space among the barrels and boxes and assorted fragrances in the back yard. Ranny was placed in front of a

RANNY

high board fence and given a glove and—as time went on—a lot of free advice, such as: “Freeze onto ’em; don’t let ’em bounce out every time. Squeeze ’em. Don’t be afraid; I won’t sling ’em hard. That’s better. . . . Aw, there you go again! What’s the matter with you?” So life went happily until Robby began to feel the frosts of a hard winter coming out of his arm. Ranny now found that the ball was acting queerly; it was always in a slightly different place from what a person had a right to expect, and he got some hard raps on the ends of his fingers.

“A little stuff on that one, huh?” asked Robby, laughingly. Then for the first time Ranny realized that the great man was pitching curves, and that he, the humble son of a wagon manufacturer, was catching them. From that moment raps on the fingers had no terrors for him. They were honorable raps—painful, but honorable.

But the “ol’ wing” was enjoying the spring thaw so much that it began to get beyond its owner’s good intentions. The ball arrived at Ranny’s glove with increasing force. In his fright he lost his head. The next thing was a cataclysm, a dark-red curtain over the daylight and an effect as of Roman candles.

Ranny did not lose consciousness, but he dropped promptly into the refuse of a popular restaurant and clamped his hands over a throbbing eye. It took the

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best pitcher in that part of the State to pry them away.

“Open your eye.” If it had been any one but Robby one would have said the man showed signs of panic.

Ranny opened his eye obediently, but closed it upon his own initiative.

“That’s all right,” said Robby. “It missed the eye—it’s underneath.”

Although the pain was great, Ranny could not cry in this exalted society. He only took a firm grip on his voice and murmured:

“You had some stuff on that one.”

He was far from unhappy. To be knocked down by the greatest pitcher in Lakeville and environs was an honor that was reserved for the select. His face was like a toothache that has broken out of bounds, but his heart was playing pleasant little tunes.

At Robby’s command the White Front cook (of an inappropriate color) came out with a piece of raw beefsteak and the two men applied it to the devastated region. Robby presently went back to his work, but his victim sat on a box in the back yard, summed up his position in society, and contemplated the surprise of his companions when he displayed this black eye and described in detail how he had come by it. He had a thrilling idea that it was a

RANNY

jump ball which had caused his undoing—if it had been a drop it would have hit him upon the shin. :

But when he was ready to go home the peerless catcher had a sorry disappointment waiting for him.

“Don’t tell anybody how you got this bloomer,” said Robby. “Your folks might get sore at me. Don’t even tell the kids.” He must have seen the stricken look upon his victim’s face, for he added: “I got an old glove around to my room. Drop in here some day an’ I’ll have it for you.”

It was with mixed feelings of elation and disappointment and with a large area below his right eye that recoiled from the touch that Ranny took his way homeward and faced the ordeal of quenching his parents’ thirst for information.

“I got hit with a baseball,” he told Mother. As the national game had been audibly flourishing back of the pickle-works all day, it was not necessary to evade further questions. And it was Mother, not he, who misinformed Father at supper-time.

“He got hit with a baseball back of the pickle-works. I don’t think he ought to play down there so much. Some of those boys are too big for him.” If Mother had only known how big the “boy” was who had laid him low!

“He’ll have to learn to take care of himself,” said Father, following his favorite theory, and he added, with faint praise, “He’s no Clarence Raleigh!”

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The explanation, "I got hit with a baseball," also served very well for the teacher's ear—on Monday the area was large and blue and shaped something like the State of New Jersey. But it would not pass with the boys, who, among them, had occupied all grounds on Saturday and knew that Ranny had not been near a ball game. It was their cheerful theory that somebody had given Ranny the licking which he so eminently deserved, for his snobbish action in the shade of the cucumber-shed had not been popular. Ted Blake, when asked whether it was he who had done this piece of exterior decoration, said it was not, but he was able and willing to oblige at any time. Josie Kendal, who enjoyed a horrified look at the dark-blue New Jersey, said, "I think boys are horrid." Tom Rucker presumed upon his long friendship to ask who had hit him and why, and upon Ranny's refusal to tell was visibly hurt. So here he was with an injury that should have brought bursts of admiration wherever he went and he was as friendless and desolate as an umpire.

At intervals of leisure he mooned about the region of the White Front Restaurant, half hoping, half fearing that he would see the object of his devotion, but not daring to go so far as to enter the restaurant. It was Tuesday before he actually beheld his favorite pitcher. Ryan was hanging upon the awning

RANNY

rope after the best usage of Lakeville clerks. He greeted Ranny cordially and noted the decline and fall of the black eye. He said nothing further about the glove and, though it would have meant everything to him in this hour of public disapproval, Ranny was too polite to ask for it.

The week compassed a reduction of Ranny's features to the normal size and color, but his social relations were still strained and his spirits low. He had hobnobbed with the great, but he had nothing to show; his light was hidden under a tight rain-barrel. If he merely attempted to tell anybody something that Robby had said the day they sat together on a board, he was accused of thinking he was smart. So matters drifted into another week and Memorial Day.

The 30th of May was, of course, a time of surcease from grinding toil. There were no divisors and multiplicands to distinguish from each other on that day or embarrassing questions as to the present whereabouts of Costa Rica. It was a day of honoring the heroic dead, and it was more—it was the time of the annual humiliation of pretentious Manchester—weather and umpire permitting. And although Lakeville sometimes intrusted minor games to people of no importance, the task of defeating Manchester always fell to Robby Ryan. In the week preceding the game, the condition of the "ol' wing" was a more

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important public question than the paving of Market Street.

So it was a vastly interested populace, with Ranny and his noisy contemporaries well in the foreground, which, the veterans having been duly remembered, assembled near the court-house corner to pay tribute to the team and shortly to follow it to the ball-park. The Manchester players had arrived on the noon train and were changing into uniforms in a room at the hotel. The local heroes were gathering rapidly and the band was playing enlivening selections. The band was complete to-day just as it had marched to the services at the cemetery. On ordinary days the ball games had to be content with such musicians as could "get off."

Ranny knew that he could not expect recognition from high quarters on so public an occasion; even adults got only stingy salutations when Robby was in his official mood. The layer of boys was thickest around Robby, just as at circus parades it enveloped the personality of the elephant. In order that Robby might at least have the pleasure of knowing that his new friend was present and loyal, Ranny spoke loudly to his companions of what Lakeville would presently do to its guests.

"They won't git a smell—them Manchesters."

"Well, who said they would?" asked Ted Blake.

"What do *you* know about baseball, anyhow?"

RANNY

"He's the worst player I ever seen," said "Fatty" Hartman out of his vast experience. "He slings like Clarence Raleigh."

"He told the teacher"—this from Ted—"that he got hit in the eye playin' ball."

"Who'd let him on any team? Tell me that." Nobody told Bud that, so he added, "All he knows how to play is wood-tag."

The defendant did his best, but he was outnumbered and outhooted. The noise of the conflict, however, arrested the attention of the peerless one, whose eye condescended to dwell upon the group of noisy fans. His face suddenly lighted.

"Hey, ol' Blackeye," he said, "come 'ere a minute. Here's that glove I promised you the day you stopped one of my fast ones with your bare face. I forgot it 'til I was gettin' out my stuff to-day."

In a mild form of insanity that was more eloquent than verbal thanks, Ranny took the thing in his unworthy hands.

"It's busted there," Robby explained, "but it won't be hard to mend."

"All right, Robby." It might as well be clear how these cronies addressed each other. "I can fix it easy. It's a fine ol' glove."

Out of a corner of his eye Ranny watched his unfortunate companions, open-mouthed with astonishment. He almost felt sorry for them—but not

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quite. Every word of Robby's had been audible to Ranny's humble friends. In that instant the veil which hid the future was torn away. He would organize a team centering about him and his glove. They would save up for caps and pants. If the boys wanted to refer to their manager-captain-pitcher as "Ol' Blackeye," why, all right.

"Wanta carry this for me?"

The delicious words roused Ranny from his day-dream. It was a new altitude record in man's humanity to boy. As one conferring knighthood, Robby handed over in the presence of the best part of Lakeville a bat which he had suddenly found himself unwilling to carry. It was not merely *a* bat, it was *the* bat—"the old black war-club" the *Bulletin* often called it—a murderous weapon and historical relic. At this emotional moment the band struck up a marching tune and the procession toward the ball-park began. Ranny buttoned the glove to his belt just over his hip after the manner of the demigods of the diamond, and put the fiendish war-club over his shoulder. Thus he walked beside his tame hero, and delicious little thrills ran up and down his spinal cord.

Yet he did not precisely walk; he floated, he was wafted. By an easy fancy, he was the center of the admiring gaze of all who lined the street or sat upon bunting-wreathed verandas or sauntered along tow-

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ard the ball-grounds. For him they shouted; for him the band was playing, the sun was shining, the roadside was gay with dandelions, birds were singing, girls in white were waving tiny American flags. He wished this parade would never end. If only he might drift forever down this stream of dusty sunlight!

But owing to the short-sighted policy of the management in building the ball-grounds so close to the town, the gate was soon in sight and Ranny saw that only minutes separated him from the time when he must slide off of Olympus and mingle with mortals again.

In the society to which Ranny belonged one never presented oneself at the entrance and wasted fifteen cents upon admission, even if one had fifteen cents. The thing was not done. Somehow it was thought soft to pay your way in. Instead, the youngest set moved into a tree just outside the fence until from the grand stand it seemed black with lively and noisy fruit. As the innings rolled on and the watchman got more and more interested in the game, discipline was bound to relax. The time always came when one could drop off of the boy-tree and climb to the top of the fence. A foul knocked in that direction was then good for three admissions, and by the seventh inning all the real people were down by the diamond seeing life. It was to this gradual

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admission to a ball game that Ranny now reconciled himself, determined, however, that his mortal spirit should be reasonably proud.

But at the gate, the personal history of Randolph Harrington Dukes entered upon a new phase. The old life had served its purpose and passed away. Robby's words came out clear; not a scoffer could ever deny them. They were accompanied by a jerk of Lakeville's most prominent thumb in Ranny's direction.

"It's all right, Jake," said Robby to the gate-keeper. "He's with me."

XIV

THE INTEMPERATE ZONE

HAVING presented himself at dinner-time with extraordinary promptness, Ranny indulged in an elaborate pretense that nothing unusual was afoot. He whistled carelessly as he wandered about the house, stopping from time to time to gaze out of the dining-room window as though fond of nature. He responded in an absent way to Mother's second request for aiding in setting the table. But all the time, whether he was watching the sidewalk for Father or laying out knives and forks, he kept his left hand in his jacket pocket. At this noontime in early June Ranny was for all practical purposes a one-armed boy.

"What's the matter with your hand, dear?" Mother asked.

"Nothin'." With an air of injured innocence he suffered the hand to be drawn out of the pocket empty.

Only, of course, there is a formula for such occasions,

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"My! how dirty!" was Mother's trite remark.

When the hands had undergone soil treatment, and Father had come home, and the baby had been over-powered and lashed into the high-chair, and the process of feeding the inner Dukes had begun, Ranny gave up the struggle against impending speech.

"I got a free ticket f'r a lecksure this afternoon. C-can I go?" He passed the pasteboard over to Father, letting it speak for itself.

"Admit one," Father read, impressively. "An Illustrated Lecture by Mrs. B. Hubbard Smitherson upon the Evils of Intemperance. Fireman's Hall, Wednesday Afternoon at Four o'Clock."

"Well, I *wondered*," said Mother, cryptically.

"I don't know." Father's words were designed to soar above the juvenile head. "Isn't it pretty early to begin that sort of thing?"

"Please let me go. Mebbe they will be pictures or something."

"I don't suppose it can do any harm," said Mother. "They wouldn't go into disgusting details—before children."

"Ever'body got tickets," Ranny argued.

"All right," Father conceded. "Probably they do it better now than they did in the days of 'Ten Nights in a Barroom.'"

So Ranny made his way back to school, clutching

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his ticket nervously. Once when he saw a rough-looking man on the walk ahead he sidled across the street.

Mrs. B. Hubbard Smitherson had shown knowledge of juvenile psychology when she got out those tickets which gave to their possessors an exaggerated idea of the value of the entertainment. A mere invitation to the lecture would not have competed with the attractions of outdoor life. Even with the "admit one" pasteboards in their pockets the boys of Ranny's class began to weaken as they approached the place of moral uplift. Ted Blake was the first to fall by the wayside.

"Aw, come on," he said; "le's don't go to the old thing. Le's play ball."

Several lukewarm enemies of the liquor traffic joined Ted in the pursuit of worldly pleasure. As the diminished band neared Fireman's Hall (more familiarly known as "the hose-house") Bud Hicks discovered that the storage-yard of the foundry contained a rusty sheet-iron tank of unknown origin. It was dilapidated and evidently designed for the melting-pot, and it suggested to Bud his favorite diversion. He picked up a stone and with characteristic accuracy caused the thing to give out an enjoyable clang. Competition sprang up and there was some more or less justified boasting, with the result that Ranny's party lost several more lively

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spirits. "Fatty" Hartman, being a notably poor stone-thrower, held a low opinion of this sport and stayed with the young crusaders; Clarence Raleigh added to the number, if not to the prestige, of the little band; the fourth was Tom Rucker, whom it was difficult to separate from Ranny on any pretext.

At the entrance to Fireman's Hall there was a most disconcerting scene. A number of ladies were entering the hall, also girls in distressing quantity. Clarence was pounced upon and taken inside by his own mother, who did not regard the human race as suitable society for her son unless she was present. On the outskirts of the crowd stood a number of boys, staring and scratching their knees, but not committing themselves to any line of action.

The sight of so many ladies filled Tom Rucker with foreboding.

"Mebbe they will get up a entertainment," he said, pessimistically. Fond as Tom was of providing personal enjoyment to his fellow-boy, he had a great dread of the formal affair managed by adults.

"I don't wanta speak a piece," said "Fatty" Hartman, who had ruined many Friday-afternoon exercises by his inability to remember farther than the third line.

Ranny shared these fears, but the ticket in his pocket cried out to be used. He had won his per-

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mission to go and felt in honor bound to do so. "Fatty" lost his nerve and joined the periphery of starers and scratchers, which presently, as by a popular movement, faded away. But Tom still hung fire.

"Come on in," said Ranny. "Who's afraid?"

"They's a nawful lot of wimmen."

"They's men, too." Ranny had reference to two ministers and old Mr. Jennings, who never lost an opportunity to show his disrespect for King Alcohol. There was also Sim Coley, but it was hardly fair to count him, because as janitor of the hose-house and the hall above his attendance was compulsory. If common report was correct, Mr. Coley had no place in a temperance meeting except, perhaps, as Exhibit A. Lem White, who worked—though not excessively—in the livery-stable, and who usually jousted with Coley at checkers in the late afternoon, was eloquently absent. Tom, upon a sudden inspiration, approached the janitor for enlightenment.

"What's this here thing gonta be, Mr. Coley?" he asked.

Sim spoke confidentially through the side of his mouth: "Don't ast me; I s'pose they're goin' to throw the harpoon into the demon rum. These W. X. Y. Z.'s makes me tired—a hunderd an' fifty chairs!"

This speech had opposite effects upon the two

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hesitators. Tom forthwith abandoned his crony and decided that if he did not go home and pile that wood he would get "a nawful whalin'." Ranny, on the other hand, got a vague impression of fancy harpoon-throwing, with Mrs. B. Hubbard Smitherson in the leading rôle. So they parted reluctantly. Ranny climbed the stairs, surrendered his ticket, and sought an inconspicuous place at the rear of the hall.

But he had reckoned without his hostess. An energetic and able-bodied middle-aged lady saw him and called out:

"Come right down here, young man. We want all the children in front."

As he had never seen this lady before, he knew that she was Mrs. B. Hubbard Smitherson, the prominent harpoonist. The children, he noted with dismay, consisted entirely of girls; even Clarence Raleigh, as little help as he was in times of peril, was seated back a little farther with his mother, a number of vacant chairs intervening between him and his fellow-man. Ranny squirmed in his feminine environment; there was no hope of escape, for he was pinned down by Mrs. Smitherson's eye.

The entertainment was almost a total loss. Outside in the sunshine normal persons were playing ball and throwing stones at tanks while he was listening to a prayer by the brick-church minister, to some remarks by Mr. Jennings, who lived across the street

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from Ranny and could be heard at any time, and finally to a long address by Mrs. Smitherson. Her harpoons, alas, were purely verbal. What she said about the demon rum was no news to Ranny; he had always held a low opinion of drink. And the lecture's sole claim to the adjective "illustrated" consisted of some charts showing the effect of alcohol upon the human frame. Mrs. Smitherson's remarks were largely long-distance shells screaming over the front ranks and bursting among the adults behind, but now and then she took pot-shots at the children. When, for example, the chart showed a cross-section of a drunkard's liver she asked:

"What little boy or girl would like to grow up and have a liver like that?"

This was not a call for volunteers, but, as a matter of fact, the picture in question was the most lively and interesting thing in the entertainment, much brighter and more attractive than the colorless teetotaler's liver which immediately followed it.

The exercises concluded with the organization of "The Cold-Water League of Lakeville." Mrs. Smitherson said, with what passed among the adults as humor, that a city with such a name ought to support a flourishing cold-water league. At once two ministers, Mr. Jennings, and a number of good ladies joined the league and pledged themselves to abstain from alcohol in any form. Especial attention was

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now directed to the rising generation. The girls, shyly and not without giggling, were all mustered in; Clarence Raleigh submitted without a struggle and was led to total abstinence by his natural guardian. Ranny, conscious of the danger of being enlisted in entertainments, hung back until the girls began to look at him as if he were a public reproach.

"I believe our little friend down there has not yet signed," said Mrs. B. Hubbard Smitherson. "I am sure he does not wish to grow up and be a drunkard."

Thus cornered, Ranny joined the league and pledged himself to a life of sobriety.

"When we adjourn," said the lecturer, "I shall give out the ribbons. I hope each and every one will take a copy of the pledge and get signatures from their friends. We want the children especially enlisted in this fight. Therefore I am glad to announce that the boy or girl who gets the largest number of signers between now and our meeting next week will receive"—Mrs. Smitherson paused for rhetorical effect—"a cash prize of one dollar!"

Clarence Raleigh made a rising motion, but immediately subsided as from a pull on the coat-tail. It was one thing, apparently, to abstain from inebriety, and quite another to circulate freely among the masses. A number of girls, however, accepted positions as enlisting officers. Ranny might have escaped from the room at this time, but he was

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stunned by the magnificence of the prize offer, and before he recovered the power of motion one of the papers had been forced upon him. Presently he found himself in the open air, pledged to abstinence and, what was worse, under bonds to secure signatures from a generation of scoffers.

Almost the first person he saw was Tom Rucker, who was engaged in a meritorious attempt to hang upon a lamp-post without the use of his hands.

"I thought you had to pile wood," said Ranny, scornfully.

Tom unwound his legs and drew near. "How was it?" he asked. "I bet it was no good."

"It was, too! It was fine. They had a drunkard's liver an'—an' ever'thing."

"I bet they're gonta have a entertainment," said Tom, hopefully.

Ranny treated himself to a hearty laugh over his friend's ignorance. "Don't you know anything?" he asked.

"What *do* ya have to do?"

"Nothin'; only git names on this here"—Ranny fumbled in his jacket pocket—"this here thing."

Tom examined the document with studious care. "What's it for?" he asked.

"Can't you understand plain printin'?" Ranny began to read aloud: "The undersig—undersiggen—I 'ain't got no time now. I gotta git somebody to

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put their name down first"—guile crept into his heart—"‘Fatty’ or somebody."

"Why should *his* name be first? He's a rotten writer," said Tom, swallowing the bait eagerly.

"Well," said Ranny, judicially, "nobody don't hafta speak a piece or anything. Only promise not to drink and join the Cold-Water Company. What 'll you give me to let you put your name down first?"

"What 'll ya take?" Thus all transactions began in the society in which these persons moved. The privilege of leading the Cold-Water League was finally knocked down to Tom for an artificial red rose which had a pin concealed inside as a substitute for fragrance. This had been a desirable property to start with, but had lately declined in value because all the foolable had now been fooled.

"Ya could use it on some greenhorn from the country," said Tom, "and have fun."

He put his name close to the printing so that nobody could crowd in above him. On his way home to supper Ranny went around by the Hartman home and found the person he wanted to see out sprinkling the dusty street with a hose. He put the proposition to "Fatty," emphasizing the immunity from piece-speaking. Somehow he managed to convey the idea that this was a kind of insurance policy against recitations,

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“What ’ll you give me to let you put your name next—under Tom’s?”

The corpulent one saw through this flimsy device and met it with an equally dishonest proposal.

“I’ll let you sprinkle here f’r”—he struggled as against a too-generous nature—“f’r fifteen minutes.”

“All right—give ’er here.” The hose was exchanged for the paper and pencil-stub, and “Fatty,” under his baptismal name, became a “W. X. Y. Z.” He then stayed about, giving helpful advice to amateur sprinklers. “Here—not like that,” he said in an unguarded moment; “let me show you.”

“’Fraid I gotta go home,” said Ranny, once freed from the burden of holding the nozzle.

On his way he considered the advisability of getting Father to sign, but put it over as unfinished business. He could get Father at any time; why waste a desirable position high on the roll? He decided not to say anything about the dollar—better let that be a surprise if he got it—but he showed the paper to his parents at supper.

“I am glad,” said Father, “that Tom and ‘Fatty’ have decided upon the strait and narrow way.”

“I’ll get a lot more signers to-morrow.” The thing did not seem so distasteful to Ranny now. If he could continue selling off the positions on the paper, perhaps he could make something of an industry of it, aside from the prize.

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But the collection of pledges on the following day proved more difficult than he had expected; before noon stock in the "water company" had taken a decided slump. Bud Hicks declined to give any valuable consideration for the third place on the roll, in fact was with difficulty persuaded to come in free. Ranny was compelled to take in several more prohibitionists on this unprofitable basis. In the face of a falling market he tackled Ted Blake at the noon hour. Ted enjoyed the reputation of being a master in assorted wickedness and did not propose to sign away this prestige lightly.

"Do you wanta grow up a drunkard," asked Ranny, appealing to the better side of Ted's nature, "an' have a liver like Sim Coley's?"

Ted did not seem to shudder much at this prospect; but in the end he sold his birthright for that prickly rose. For the first time shares in the Cold-Water Company sold below par.

In the afternoon, conquering a sex prejudice in the interest of the larger good, Ranny pulled the pigtail that depended over his desk and invited Josie Kendal to abstain from the flowing bowl. Josie looked over his collection of reformed criminals without enthusiasm.

"I don't want to put my name down with *them*," she said in part. Before this interview ended (by the teacher's request) it became clear that he could

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not make any headway among the girls of the class; they would sign up with their own kind. Fortunately this rule worked both ways.

"I bet," he said to one recalcitrant, "you wrote y'r name down f'r some girl."

The accused signed the pledge in defense of his character, and Ranny used this blackmailing device three times before it was worn out.

But if girls were not in his province, what about adults? It was Friday afternoon before he could nerve himself to crossing the great gulf. He would make one test case and govern himself by the result; it had better be a woman, and it must be some one who had not been present at the last meeting. Finally he decided upon Miss Barrows, the "maiden lady" who lived in the little cottage where there were so many flowers and whitewashed stones. Miss Barrows was of a genial disposition and sometimes gave a person cookies; if she refused to give up liquor she would at least not commit assault. Yet somehow as he entered Miss Barrows's gate the hand that held the paper trembled a little. At such a time of nervous tension it is fatal to encounter any deviation from the set program, so when he was only half-way up the stone-bordered path and the door opened and Miss Barrows called out a cherry welcome, he was completely demoralized.

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"Well, Ranny, this *is* a pleasure," she said. "What can I do for you?"

In terror of the deed he had to do, he thrust the paper behind him.

"Miss Barrows," he said, and gulped twice, "h-h-have you seen anything of—of my guinea-pig?"

"Why, no, dear. Did it run away?"

"I thought mebbe— Well, goo'-by." Ranny retreated in poor order down the path. Thus ended the crusade among the adults. Better lose the prize twenty times over than go through this sort of thing again.

Except, of course, Father. But it developed that Father had two deep, if somewhat conflicting, prejudices: one was against drink and the other was against pledges.

"I don't need to sign any paper to keep myself straight," he said. "Of course it's different with these rough characters"—indicating the names on Ranny's list. "Perhaps Mother might be persuaded to lead a better life."

Mother laughed and agreed to sign anything within reason; her only protest was against the unsanitary, chewed-up pencil provided by the management.

In the morning Ranny, with his weekly ten cents secure in his hand and his hand secure in his pocket and a fine new plan in his mind, started for Mrs. Leonard's little store. There, after research, he in-

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vested his entire capital in jelly-beans, hard outside and gummy within.

"Well, you are rich this morning," said the storekeeper.

Ranny usually wasted his substance on the installment plan.

"I need a lotta beans," he replied.

This was not self-indulgence, but investment; the jelly-bean was the smallest standard of value provided by Mrs. Leonard's mint. He now took his way toward "Frogtown." As he approached that place of youthful congestion he saw a clump of boys expressing their opinions at the edge of the marsh. Taking one of the beans out of the bag he munched it publicly and was immediately surrounded. Ranny gave out nothing but smacks.

"Um-m! pretty good," he said, and added, as if suddenly stricken with an idea: "I tell you. Every fella that signs this here thing gits a bean."

"What is it?" asked a cautious "Frogtowner."

"It's nothin'. You don't hafta speak pieces or anything. You git a ribbon free—but you don't hafta wear it; you could keep it in your pocket."

"Yeah, but what is it?"

A valuable thought came to Ranny. "Here, read it your *own* self." He consumed another bean with histrionic enjoyment.

Unwilling to admit that this wilderness of words

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meant nothing to him, the skeptic fell back upon barter.

"I'll sign it f'r three beans."

"Yeah, I guess you will! Think I'm rich?"

In the end, visible "Frogtown" renounced the wine-cup at the rate of two beans per head. Equal suffrage prevailed and Mary Murray sold her vote at regular rates. Furthermore, Mary proposed to enter her infant brother, John, who was acting disorderly on behalf of beans. Ranny had no precedent for accepting the proxies of uneducated people, but agreed to pay one bean in advance for whatever John might do personally. The infant was given the pencil and amid universal snickering achieved a signature that consisted of a hole in the paper, a tear-drop, and a line that began life as a corkscrew and later ran fast and loose among the names above. John fell in love with the new sport; it took another bean to get him to stop signing the pledge.

When night terminated Ranny's activities he had in all twenty-four signatures, not counting the inappropriate corkscrew. On the following day he added three names from his Sunday-school class, the teacher being among those who mounted the water-wagon. From this time on things went more slowly. The secret of the dollar prize was now generally known and those still unregenerate were holding out for ruinous prices.

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On Wednesday, when the Cold-Water League assembled in convention, Ranny had thirty names upon his paper. But he had done more than secure pledges; he had also press-agented the meeting with subtle skill. They would be surprised at what was going to happen, he said, darkly. He did not originate—though he took no pains to put at rest—the rumor that some pleasing atrocity would be committed upon Sim Coley. Nobody claimed to believe that Mr. Coley would be vivisected to make a Lakeville holiday, but when, just before the meeting opened, he stepped to the speaker's table with a pitcher of that liquid which is so useful for putting out fires, he met with the surprise of his life. It was nothing short of an ovation. From Ranny's solid block of alcohol-fighters came one triumphant blast of approval. Ted Blake was so carried away by his feelings that he whistled upon two fingers. When the retreating janitor looked violently upon his admirers, their enthusiasm broke all bonds; girls and adults joined ignorantly in the applause.

Mrs. B. Hubbard Smitherson, who was now approaching the platform, mistook the purport of this demonstration and flushed with pleasure.

"I am very glad," she said, "to see such a large and enthusiastic gathering and so many boys enlisted in the fight against rum."

How different this was, Ranny thought, from last

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week, with the place full of girls and all the best people outdoors throwing stones at tanks! Presently it was time to see who had secured the greatest number of pledges; Mr. Jennings and the two ministers were asked to be an auditing committee, because of the superiority of the male mind in statistics. The result was apparent to the auditors as soon as they had opened the papers. It is true that Gertie Riley had made a brave showing by running wild among the large Riley relationship, but the efforts of the girls were scattering, while Ranny had all the boys there were. Mr. Jennings announced that the greatest number of signatures (not counting one which they had been unable to decipher) had been secured by his young friend and neighbor, Randolph Dukes. Ranny's crowd responded with boisterous, if self-interested, cheers.

Mrs. Smitherson now with dramatic effect produced a bright silver dollar and presented it to Ranny with remarks, complimentary to him, but predicting a dismal future for John Barleycorn.

"Now," she said, when Ranny had regained his place at the end of the row and was permitting privileged neighbors brief glimpses of his wealth, "now I am going to tell you a great secret. For our campaign to drive the dram-shop out of Lakeville we must first raise money. To do this we are going to have—guess"—Mrs. B. Hubbard

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Smitherson's face broke into an arch smile—"an entertainment."

There was a clapping of hands—weak, girlish hands, restrained adult hands. Ranny's blood froze solid, his heart stopped beating, his interior collapsed into a heap of ruins. Presently he realized that Tom Rucker was laying violent hands upon him.

"I thought you said they wasn't goin' to be no entertainment."

Ranny could not think of the answer to this, so he grabbed his cap and fled, Tom at his heels, "Fatty" Hartman at Tom's, apparently all the rest of society at "Fatty's." They came roaring and clattering down the narrow stairway demanding their toll of human life. Out upon the sidewalk they poured, whirling about Ranny in an angry eddy, catching up Janitor Coley and tossing him about like a cork.

"They didn't tell me!" cried Ranny. "She said it was a secrut, didn't she? What 're you pickin' on me for? Come on"—this in desperation—le's git sumpin' good."

Anger died and hunger was born; Ranny was in almost as much bodily danger from one as from the other. Two speed records were shattered that afternoon—a meeting was broken up while Mrs. B. Hubbard Smitherson was taking two gasps and Alleston's staple and fancy grocery changed from a

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sleepy calm to a typhoon while James B. Alleston, Prop., was taking his feet off of the ledger.

Not until the prize money had melted away and nature was bathed in the mellow light of sunset was Ranny's debt of honor canceled. Then the party broke up and the zone of sticky cheeks and tired jaws widened out over Lakeville as waves from a stone dropped in the water. Ranny, who had treated himself throughout with justice tempered with generosity, now ate his way homeward, finding pleasant little surprises in out-of-the-way pockets. At the supper-table he showed a distaste for commonplace viands.

"What's the matter with your appetite, dear?" Mother asked.

"I'm not feeling so very hungry," Ranny replied. "I must have eat something."

At the Dukes home there was a panacea for all ailments—coughs, colds, loss of appetite, and misconduct: Ranny, against his better judgment, went to bed. At nine Father came in to see whether he was all right and found him still awake.

"Mr. Jennings was over a while ago," said Father. "He told us that you got a dollar prize and then broke up the meeting. What did you do that for?"

"I promised the boys if they would write their name they wouldn't be no entertainment. Mis' Smitherson said now they's goin' to be a entertain-

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ment and they was mad an' picked on me an' ever'-thing. So we bought some candy—an' cookies—an' some raisins."

"Is that all?"

"An' a couple of bananas an' prunes."

"Is *that* all?"

"Yes, that's all, 'cept peanuts an' buttered popcorn. An' a few pickles."

"How much did you spend of your dollar?"

"Pert near all—but what's in my pocket."

An inventory of Ranny's clothing showed a piece of taffy that seemed to be there for good, two cents, and part of a peanut shell.

"Well, you *have* been on a tear." For a moment Father seemed amused at something, then became very sober.

"Do you know what the word temperance means?"

There was a light step at the bedroom door and Father turned his head.

"Come on in, Mother," he said. "Have you got a ticket? There's going to be a lecture by Thomas Dukes, the wagon-maker, upon the evils of intemperance."

XV

DAY OF WRATH

ANOTHER summer was half gone. The reign of the dog-star was heavy upon the dusty town, and the barefoot citizens who were mistreating Mr. Webber's outer lawn were racked with discord. It was too hot to fare forth out of the maple-tree oasis, and all sedentary occupations had been used up. Mumble-peg had collapsed under quarrels, the mild pleasure of whistling upon grass-blades held between the thumbs had lost its flavor, and blowing dandelion seeds to see whether your mother wanted you was abandoned because the thing kept coming out wrong. "Fatty" Hartman, without lifting his head, spoke vaguely of finding some sour-grass to eat. Tom Rucker wished that the street were the lake, but he was sharply informed that if you went swimming in dog-days you would get sick and die.

"You would *not*."

"You would, too. I betcha a million dollars," said Bud Hicks.

“Yeah, you ’ain’t got a million dollars.”

And so the talk went sliding down the intellectual plane until all hands were feebly discussing what they would do if they had a million dollars.

“I’d put it in the haymow,” said Bud, “an’ ever’ time I needed some candy—”

“You couldn’t *get* a million dollars in a haymow.” This ill-natured objection was made by Ted Blake.

“You could, too!”

“Could not!”

If Ted Blake and Bud Hicks had stood upon their heads then and there the value of the assets falling from their pockets would not have exceeded three cents, yet, so irritating was the weather and so frazzled the state of the public nerves, they fell to fighting over the possibility of getting a million dollars into a haymow. The dog-star must have snickered upon his throne. In the discussion Bud fell underneath, and Ted’s economic theories were marching on to victory when he felt the sharp point as of a parasol sticking into his ribs. He looked up into the strong and intelligent face of Mrs. Thompson.

“What’s all this fighting about?”

Mrs. Thompson was built upon a rather generous plan, and her question had an official sound as something coming from the court-house. The belligerents only glared at each other, so the labor of explanation

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fell upon that innocent bystander and knee-scratcher, Randolph Harrington Dukes.

"We're all the time fighting," said Ranny, gloomily. "Whenever we try to have a little fun we get into fights."

If Mrs. Thompson had not herself piloted two youths through potential homicide to law-abiding manhood she might have said that it was wicked to fight and that little children should love one another—and gone her righteous way, leaving Ted and Bud to resume their cat-and-dog life at leisure. But Mrs. Thompson was a practical idealist as well as a lover of peace. So she addressed Ranny, choosing her words carefully, as one opening a new chapter of history.

"I know a good plan. All you boys club together and agree to this: whenever two of you have any trouble, wait a certain length of time. Then if you still feel that you have to fight—why, fight."

"You mean, get up a kind of a club?" asked Ranny, who had lately acquired a taste for holding office.

Mrs. Thompson belonged to that class of people who conceive of conversation as an intermittent monologue. She answered questions, if at all, only when time hung heavy upon her hands.

"I think ten days would be about right," she said.

Ted Blake was the first to catch her meaning.

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"Too long," he muttered, with a covert glance at his half-licked enemy.

"We will call it the Friends of Peace," continued Mrs. Thompson. "I can get the badges."

"What would we have to do?" asked "Fatty" Hartman, the prominent recliner.

"Well, good-by, boys. I'll let you know when the buttons come."

"I don't know if we—"

"I think blue-and-white would be nice." Mrs. Thompson's farewell address not only cut Ranny down in the midst of an important remark, but also left the whole group more or less wobbly with astonishment. Bud Hicks, who had passed away at the first appearance of the lady, now came to life and said:

"That wouldn't be any good. Le's don't do—"

His sentence found itself without visible means of support, for Ted Blake was making demonstrations.

"You couldn't belong if you wanted to," said Ted.

"What 've *you* got to say to it?"

"What 've I got to say to it? Listen to that. I'm goin' to be president. That's all I got to say to it."

"First I heard of it," replied Bud, weakly.

Ted indulged in his favorite practice of bunching up his muscle. The sleeve of his shirt had been torn in the late unpleasantness, and through this informal

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show-window one could see his biceps enjoying an attack of cramps. Ted was elected president without a dissenting—or assenting—voice.

“I’ll be secatary,” cried Ranny.

All present now seized jobs by the vocal or round-ball method, with the result that several ladies of the neighborhood came out upon their front porches and looked distressed. They would have been surprised to hear the name of the society that was being organized so loudly.

When everybody, including Vice-President Hicks, had an office, it seemed fairly certain that there would be a club. Ranny meditated upon his new position, his eyes searching the landscape for inspiration. They found it in the sulphur-colored house of Mr. Webber, the reliable druggist.

“Wait here,” he cried. “I gotta get sumpin’. Don’t nobody go away.”

He hurried off to his own home near by and returned with a memorandum-book and a sad-looking lead-pencil. The book had been lavished upon him by Mr. Webber—hence the inspiration. It contained a number of ruled pages, a calendar, a list of the nicknames of all the States, and reading-matter indorsing an all-healing medicine, the whole handsomely illustrated with pictures of ladies and gentlemen in pain.

“This here is the secatary’s book.” To prove his

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statement, Ranny printed upon its outside cover, "Freinds of Peace."

"What 're you goin' write in it?" asked "Fatty," who had secured the easy office of assistant treasurer.

"'S all right," said Ranny. "I know, all right."

While he was floundering around in a mental vacuum, trying to think up something to put in his book, the patched-up peace between the president and vice-president broke down. Ted maintained that the vice-president had no rights, duties, or reason for existence. "I'll lick the stuffin' outa you," he shouted, with appropriate gestures.

"You can't do that," said Ranny, earnestly. "It's ag'inst the rules of the club. You gotta wait ten days." He did mental arithmetic over the calendar in his book. "That'll be the twenty-first of August."

"Aw, what's the matter with ya?" Ted looked around for moral support, but did not find any. "Well," he conceded, "I'll lick the stuffin' outa ya on the twenty-first of August."

"All right. You can do that." Ranny was generous with other people's contents.

"Yeah, I'd like to see you try," said Bud.

Here "Fatty" fell a victim to internal amusement.

"S'posen they'd forgit they was mad at each other," he chuckled, "an' go aroun' bein' good friends."

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It was in this lowly quarter that Ranny found the elusive idea. "I'll write it down in the book," he cried. "What you s'pose the secatary's for? I got to put down all the fights."

The idea met with instant approval, and Ranny, though not excessively muscular, became the central figure of the Friends of Peace. In fact, it soon looked as if he were the only friend that peace had in the world, for the club members, anxious to make use of the new machinery of violence, promptly picked quarrels with one another and had Ranny record them in his book. As time went on, Ranny got into little disputes in connection with his book-keeping duties and was able to set down a few undying hatreds of his own. Mrs. Thompson might have chosen as the society's motto some such sentiment as: "Stop! Look! Listen!" but the unofficial slogan of the Friends of Peace was, "I'll lick the stuffin' out of you on the twenty-first of August."

A delightful feature of the organization meeting was the advent of Clarence Raleigh, arrayed in green linen, and walking sedately in shady places.

"Hey, Clarence!" shouted Ted Blake. "Want to join the peace club?"

Clarence must have thought that the dove of peace had fallen into strange company, for he backed up against the fence and asked, "What is it for?"

"You look like a bush," said "Fatty," who was

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punched to silence in the interest of the higher ridicule.

"The object of the club," announced Ranny, striving to be official, "is, if you get mad at somebody an' he says— Now—you know—s'posen—"

"Ya gotta wait ten days," said Tom Rucker, leaping over Ranny's prostrate sentence.

"An' nobody must have fights," said Ted, shrewdly.

This, at least, seemed to convey some idea to Clarence.

"Why, yes," said he, "I'll belong if my mother will let me."

Before the poor neophyte could collect his puzzled wits he had contracted five engagements to have his "stuffin'" removed on the twenty-first of August. His hurried departure left the pacifists almost helpless with mirth.

"Le's go 'round and git new members," said Ted. "C'm'on, ever'body."

"'Frogtown' first," Ranny yelled. "'They's loads of fighters there."

So the mystified mothers of the neighborhood were treated to the spectacle of a group of boys, a short time ago prostrated by the climate, running at full speed in the blazing sunshine of mid-afternoon.

This league to enforce peace swept through Lakeville like a tropical plague—down narrow alleys

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bordered with dusty ragweed, along foot-blistering board sidewalks, over railroad ties broiled in oil, and along the marsh road (with fine powder shooting from beneath the feet) to where "Frogtown" lay gasping in an atmosphere of wilted sedges and half-baked mud. "Frogtown" paid its toll of human life. Even "Sausage" Buckley, once convinced of the club's real nature, became a Friend of Peace and signed articles of enmity all around. Back of the pickle-works a group of theoretical ball-players, lying in the shade of the cucumber-shed, surrendered in a body. Out on Berry Street a boy who was sprinkling the road with a garden-hose joined the society—but not until he had drenched its officers in his ignorance of the rules. The propaganda spread eastward as far as the home of Tug Wiltshire, who, desperate for reading-matter, was studying a harness-maker's catalogue. Tug stopped improving his mind long enough to join the association and make a limited number of appointments for the day of wrath. His quarrel with Ranny was over the alleged misspelling of the word "Freinds."

The proceedings had become crystallized into a formula; life was one long succession of crises and resolutions. Ted Blake, accompanied by his secretary, approached the prospective member, insulted him, and was counter-insulted. If it were not for his membership in this club, Ted then pointed out, he

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would punish the person then and there for his obnoxious traits. Ranny now explained the object of the organization, and the new member's name, together with any atrocities he cared to have committed upon him, were duly set down. The minor officers acted as spectators, guards, and boasters, but it was always Ted who breathed violence. Ted's friendship for peace was purely platonic; he was a pacifist with the accent on the fist.

But rumors of the new movement went even farther than its founders and in a different direction. They followed the sun into the fastnesses of the West Ward, a region of gruff, two-fisted people who had never heard the word peace. Inevitably the news reached the ears of "Butch" Willet, who was spending the day in the lake. Hastening into his simple two-piece costume, "Butch" jumped upon his bicycle and before his hair was dry encountered the officers of the Friends of Peace returning from the day's work.

"Hey, Blake!" cried this muscular barbarian. "I heard you got up a fight club. I'll belong."

The president had not thought of "Butch" in this connection. In his relations with the West-Warder Ted had been more bullied against than bullying.

"I don't know if you'd like it," said Ted.

"The object of the club—" It was no time for Ranny's set speech, for "Butch" was singing the

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hymn of hate and demanding membership. Slowly, almost drop by drop, the idea was inserted into the simple western mind that the Friends of Peace pledged themselves to weak arbitration for ten days, and that free white-and-blue buttons depended upon this provision. All made damaging remarks about their club. A person of a more sensitive nature would have seen that he was not wanted.

"These here fights can't be till the twenty-first of August," said Ranny, displaying the archives. He only wanted to show the part he played in the club's affairs, but putting the thing into "Butch's" hands was a mistake. In a moment it was clear that this was "Butch's" favorite book. His relish of the thing seemed almost morbid.

"Put me down for fights with all you fellas"—his eye swept around the circle, compelling silence—"I'll knock you into the middle of next week."

"They ain't room for any more names," said Ranny. His generous up-hill hand and the day's brisk trading had used up all of the writing-space.

But "Butch" swept away technicalities and compelled the secretary to set down his fights on margins and among calendars and testimonials.

"You see that fella," said he, pointing out an unhappy person labeled, "Before Taking." "That's how Ted Blake will look when I git through with him."

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"You think you're awful smart," Ted replied. He actually said this aloud, but it is a significant fact that he did not say it until "Butch" had mounted his wheel and was half a block away. "What 'd ya have to go to work an' show 'im the book for?"

"We don't hafta tell 'im when we have our fights, do we?" Ranny replied.

"We could go off somewheres, if it's a nice day an' everything," suggested Bud Hicks.

"Boggs's woods," said Tom.

"Le's take our dinner," said "Fatty."

Before they parted for the night it was agreed that, weather and parents permitting, an important portion of the human race would abolish itself in Boggs's woods by the lake, with incidental swimming and feasting, on the 21st of August, and that only the pleasanter and less muscular people would be invited. They would tell their parents about Mrs. Thompson, but they would not tell Mrs. Thompson about the picnic.

Through the intervening days the pride of authorship marched with Randolph Harrington Dukes. The book attended his gettings-up and his lyings-down; it went with him about his dusty August duties, a hip-pocket library of ready reference. By the second day it had lost its pristine beauty, and by the fifth, its cover. When the fatal day ap-

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proached it was a stained and ragged bundle. There had been no attempt to start a new volume of mutual dislikes. If half of the promises for the 21st were to be kept, history would have nothing to do for the rest of time.

The parents of the Friends of Peace fell easy victims. Ranny's Father chuckled a little, for no good reason, but any doubts Mother may have had were removed by a telephone talk with Mrs. Thompson. This society was not the first to discover the value of a respectable figurehead.

The weather also permitted—for the 21st dawned fine and clear, a beautiful day for destruction and desolation—but to the supersensitive it might have appeared that L. J. Boggs did not. At least a sign in his name at the entrance to his lakeside grove halted the dozen or more exclusive characters, laden with paper parcels and shoe-boxes, with a cordial invitation not to enter, under the penalty of the law.

"Aw, who's afraid of ol' Boggsy?" said Ted Blake. "C'm'on, le's go in."

Bud Hicks showed how little he trembled by hurling a stone at the sign and almost hitting it. So with co-operative bravery the society moved on toward the pebbly shore of the lake. Clarence Raleigh, though he had been invited with suppressed snickers, had not turned up at the meeting-place.

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Ranny, impressed by the large amount of work the society had before it, pulled out the book of ancient grudges and proposed that the exercises begin at once. "I'll read off the names," he said. "One fight at a time."

"No; let's have our dinner first," said "Fatty." It was already ten o'clock and "Fatty" had taken no nourishment since breakfast, except three apples.

The Friends of Peace debated the question of fighting *vs.* eating, and compromised by going swimming just east of the no-bathing sign. This was done in spite of Tom Rucker's statement that all would get sick and die. Tom could argue brilliantly on either side of this question.

"The first thing we know," said Ranny, "it 'll be night an' we won't have no time for them fights."

Nevertheless, after a pleasant session in the deadly waters, every one was too hungry for hostilities. After dinner there was an era of good feeling that Ranny found distressing.

"I work hard an' write down all them names," said Ranny, "an' now nobody fights. What kind of a club is this, anyhow?"

"It's a peace club," said "Fatty." His remark was greeted with the disdain which it deserved.

Presently there was a game of catch with a yarn ball, and three members fell into the lake—Tom Rucker purposely, because of his desire to entertain

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his fellow-boy. But finally all excuses were exhausted, and Ted Blake and Bud Hicks were advised to get into a hostile frame of mind toward each other. There were to be no rules to interfere with the free play of brutality, though up to the last the president insisted that the vice-president was not allowed to bite his ear. At this crucial point history, after its eccentric fashion, repeated itself. The phenomenon appeared as the sound of wheels and Mrs. Thompson, driving her reliable family horse. Beside her, sitting in polite elegance, was discovered Clarence Raleigh. Clarence had adopted Mrs. Thompson as a shield against violence. One of the chickens of the Friends of Peace had come home to roost.

"Why, boys! you're not having a fight, I hope. My goodness!" Mrs. Thompson added, taking a closer look at the belligerents, "Are you at it yet?"

"We're—we're havin' a meeting," said Ranny, helpfully.

"Well, let's come to order." Mrs. Thompson seated herself upon a stump. "Who is the president?"

Ted Blake dropped his fists and took up the duties of his office. But here another of the peace club's chickens came home to roost—*viz.*, L. J. Boggs, making demonstrations.

"You kids get out of this woods," he cried, flour-

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ishing a stick. "Every last one of—of— Oh, how do, Mrs. Thompson? I didn't know you was here with the boys."

"We're having a little meeting of our club," said the patroness. "I'll see that the boys do no harm."

L. J. Boggs's collapse was almost pathetic—quite as if Mrs. Thompson's husband's bank held a mortgage upon that very woods.

Ranny now took the center of the stage. "We hav'n't been fighting," he said, "an' whenever we had any trouble we put it down in this here"—business of digging in pockets—"in this here fight-book. An' now it's ten days an' you said we gotta fight in ten days. An' so now—it's ten days."

Mrs. Thompson did not take the official records in her hands, but she poked them as one inspecting garbage.

"But we don't *have* to fight just because the ten days are up. We could burn the book and declare peace."

"We—we couldn't burn up our secatary's book," Ranny protested.

"We'll make a kind of ceremony of it—like a little play."

"No, ma'am." Ranny was fighting for the work of his hand and brain. "I don't think—"

What Ranny did not think was not immediately forthcoming, for he beheld Ted Blake trying to con-

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vey an idea by the sign language. He was to turn around and look at the lake. Still another peace-club chicken had come home to roost.

This one might more properly be called a duck, for it came by water. Only a face was visible—a scowling face, registering baffled rage. “Butch” was evidently dressed more for pugilism than for the society of ladies.

“Well, all right,” said Ranny. “I gotta be the burner.”

It took all of the officers to accomplish the ceremony, Assistant-Treasurer Hartman’s part being purely advisory. Mrs. Thompson made well-chosen remarks predicting the end of all war, and closed by pinning upon every chest present the white-and-blue button of the cherished order.

“I must be going now,” she said. “Coming, Clarence?”

Ted took another look at the lake. “Butch” was standing neck-deep, waiting for a chance to come ashore and make people look like chronic sufferers.

“Le’s go with Mis’ Thompson to the gate,” he said. “Fall in, ever’body. Forward, march!”

“Butch” must have decided to follow at a discreet distance, for when Ranny looked back he beheld one of the most charming sights of a life that had fallen in pleasant places. A boy dressed in bathing-

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trunks hastening toward the water, pursued by that enraged land-owner, L. J. Boggs.

At the highway the society parted from Mrs. Thompson with a salvo of cheers. After this sweet sorrow the Friends of Peace gave themselves up to anarchy and pleasure. There were four fights—not official, but plain fights, quick to come and go, like summer showers. There was a green-apple battle with certain East-Warders, during which Ted transformed himself from president to general, and gave stern orders which nobody obeyed. There was informal stone-throwing; one game of round ball flourishing in a side-street was broken up. It was late afternoon when the five original members and officers reached their own neighborhood. Tom Rucker looked like a friend of peace who had been left out in the rain overnight; there was an assortment of sunburns and mosquito-bites and a stone-bruise or two, and upon the person of “Fatty” Hartman what promised to be an amusing case of poison-ivy. As they limped down the home-stretch they gently tripped and poked one another and rubbed one another’s heads with knuckles and felt a kingship over all created things—full of dust and joy and oxygen. Pacifists returning from the chase.

“Le’s have another one nex’ week. They won’t know the difference.” By “they” Ranny was un-

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derstood to mean the gullible adult world who took the Friends of Peace at face value.

At dusk, amid the fiddling of the katydids, when the world sat cooling itself on porches, and white-clad hatless girls strolled toward soda-fountains, and old Mr. Jennings wet down his lawn with a garden-hose, Ranny was not so sure. Father had been giggling over an item in the *Evening Bulletin*. "Isn't it fine to have him home safe and sound?" he asked Mother. As was so often the case, there was no point to Father's joke. For all the paper had to say was this:

A boys' organization, the Friends of Peace, held a picnic meeting in Boggs's grove to-day. All will recover.

XVI

A BABY'S PLACE

IT was a beautiful, unhappy Saturday afternoon in September—unhappy because it was beautiful and Saturday, and because Mother had felt it necessary to go out for the afternoon, leaving Ranny in charge of the baby. He had been disarmed with an apology, then roped and branded with an exacted promise.

“I am sorry the meeting is on Saturday,” Mother had said, “but it was the only time the ladies could agree upon. You will take good care of her, won’t you?”

Now the golden afternoon was slipping away and tingly little breezes stirred the curtains and brought in faint sounds as of human beings enjoying life, and there he sat contorting his face for a highly critical bald-headed row of one. Presently the tumult and the shouting lost its vagueness and became a yodel, high and insistent, a promissory note of vivid recreation.

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Tom Rucker, interviewed at the front gate of the Dukes residence, spoke in part as follows:

"C'm'on over. We're gonta have some fun in our barn."

"I can't," Ranny replied. "I gotta stay at home an' take care of the—the house an' ever'thing. My mother's gone to a meeting."

"Aw!" said Tom Rucker.

"You stay here," Ranny proposed. "We could do somethin' in the back yard. An' if any burglars would come—bing!" His gesture clearly indicated burglars going up in smoke.

But burglar-binging, it appeared, was out of the question, because Tom had left his barn to the mercy of Ted Blake, and Ted was not one to be trusted long with a barn that one cherished.

"Well, I promised I'd take good care of the baby," admitted Ranny.

"Where?" asked Tom.

"Huh?"

"Where did you promise you'd take care of the baby?"

"In the sitting-room. Wha's the differ'nce?"

"I don't mean that, you crazy." Tom's ears waved a little as they always did at times of intellectual strain. "I mean like this. Did you promise you'd take care of 'im right there in the house all the time?"

"It's a her," said Ranny.

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“Well, *her*, then. Did you promise you wouldn’t take care of ’er along to our barn. An’ it could sit on the hay an’ have fun. Because we ain’t got a horse, now, so nothing would step on him or anything.”

“It’s a *her*,” said Ranny.

“Your mother wouldn’t care, an’ you could get home before she did, an’ she wouldn’t know anything about it. Them meetings always lasts about a million years. An’ then they talk awhile afterward.”

“No, I guess—”

But Tom was on a new train of thought and would not get off for anybody.

“They say, ‘Come an’ see me,’ an’ then they answer back: ‘Yes, I will. *You* come over.’ Tom was doing elaborate bows now and his voice was dripping honey. “‘Goo’-by, Mrs. Flapdoodle.’” With a cunning pretense of accident, Tom backed into a tree.

Tom Rucker, companionable at all times, was irresistible when he was in his farce-comedy mood. Imagine anything more delicious than that “Mrs. Flapdoodle”! So Ranny agreed, only stipulating that they go by the private alleyway and that they carry the impediment upon the velocipede instead of taking the baby-carriage.

Having locked the door and put the key where Mother could easily find it (as could any one else

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desiring a key) they set off, the two boys holding their misfortune upon the seat between them and pushing the vehicle along, at the same time trying to carry on an intelligent conversation about the county fair, the poster advertisements of which had appeared upon the bill-boards. Ranny's young sister, in whose opinion any change was an improvement, took heartily to the new system of transportation and said something that sounded like, "Glee."

"What 'd I tell you? It likes it." Tom had settled upon the neuter gender as a workable compromise.

But the alley, in the natural course, had to cross a street, and here, unhappily, the party encountered Bud Hicks, an accomplished scoffer, whose unlovely face registered astonishment, then amusement. He sank so low as to tip his hat.

"How do, ladies?" he said. "Ain't it a beautiful day?"

"Aw, what's the matter with ya?" demanded Tom. "'Ain't you got no sense?"

"My goodness! what a lovely child!" Bud went on, remorselessly.

"It's a—it's a trick rider," said Tom, desperately. "You know—lady bareback rider an' ever'thing. Jumps through hoops."

"Le's see 'er do it," said Bud.

Here Ranny saw a great light. "They's goin' to

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be a county fair over at Tom's," he said. "Live stock an' ever'thing like that." The idea was rapidly becoming a good one. "We are goin' to give out blue ribbons."

"Babies ain't live stock," said Bud.

"They's goin' to be all kinds of animals," said Ranny, ignoring the technical point.

"How much?"

"How much what?"

"How much to git in?"

"A nickel," said Tom, hastily.

"Whew!" exclaimed Bud. "Nobody 'll come. Nobody 'd pay a nickel to see babies. I wouldn't pay a nickel to see a barnful of babies. I wouldn't *want* to see 'em."

"If you bring a live stock," said Tom, "you don't have to pay. That's the way it is at all fairs. They have extra red tickets for 'em. They call 'em ex—ex—"

"Exibitter," said Ranny.

"Exibitter," said Tom.

"Yeah, I know," said Bud—"exibitter."

At this point the live stock, unaware of the fact that she had suddenly been changed from a liability to an asset, demanded less talk and more action. Bud agreed to get his cat if he could find it, and to tell "Fatty" Hartman about the fair.

At Tom's barn, which was still intact, they fore-

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stalled criticism by announcing the exposition. Ted fell into the spirit of the thing and went off with vague ideas of getting hold of something that would come under the head of live stock. Meanwhile Tom and Ranny busied themselves with boxes and boards and the pioneer exhibit amused herself by getting in the way. Tom decided that his own contribution would be a cow named Nellie. He would not bring his exhibit into the barn, but would leave her in the lot which she now inhabited, and any one needing to look at her could step over and do so without extra charge. For Nellie's last name was not Rucker; she belonged to a neighbor who might prefer that she be let alone.

The problem that next presented itself was "Fatty" Hartman, who had heard the good news from Bud, but who came without either nickel or animal.

"Are you a exhibitter?" asked Ranny, always willing to show verbal goods.

The word struck "Fatty" as a toothsome one. "Exibitter, exhibitter," he said, with apparent relish.

"A exhibitter—" Ranny started to explain, but "Fatty" felt an attack of poetry stealing over him.

"Bitter, bitter, exhibitter
Had a wife an' couldn't hit 'er."

Presently he set the thing to music and added a ponderous little dance, during the course of which he

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illegally entered the barn. Tom and Ranny started to put him out when a complication arose. It seemed that the fascinating creature had danced himself into the affections of Exhibit A, who was now puckering up her face in grief at the parting.

"He could be the judge," said Tom.

"Huh? They gotta be a judge?" asked Ranny.

"The fella that gives out the blue ribbon."

"No," said Ranny, frankly, "he don't know enough." A fresh outburst of sorrow from Exhibit A. "Well, all right, I jes' as leave."

"You take care of the live stock till the show opens," said Tom, waving toward Ranny's sister.

"Hello, live stock!" said "Fatty," making a grimace that was well received.

The tears had plowed little furrows through the barn dust upon the distressed maiden's face, which now presented the appearance of an irrigated field.

So the two problems were set to solving each other and progress had a chance once more. But it was not for long, because there presently approached a hullabaloo which resolved itself into Ted Blake trying to import another infant, some unknown Exhibit B, to compete for blue ribbons with the daughter of the house of Dukes. Ted presented as astonishing a sight as ever walked into anybody's barn. He held the little stranger in his arms, but he was bent and twisted by reason of a tightly

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clutched ear. In fact he was so complicated in appearance that one could scarcely guess which way he was going. Only by causing unhappiness could he divest himself of his exhibit without giving up a cherished ear. It was "Fatty" again who came to the rescue.

"Exibitter, exhibitter," he said, making a splendid face. Thus he entangled himself in another set of heart-strings and added to his caretaker's duties.

"That's my brother," announced Ted Blake.

"Didn't know you had one," said Ranny.

"I never told anybody," Ted replied, uneasily.

Ranny looked with suspicion upon this unsuspected baby Blake. The new-comer was no beauty, but neither, for that matter, was Ted. Whereas Miss Dukes's head was shaped like an orange slightly flattened at the poles, this baby's superstructure was narrow and high, tending slightly to resemble a lima-bean. Somehow one got the impression that he had not had any supper lately. The more Ranny looked at this baby the less he was surprised that Ted had never acknowledged him before.

Presently Bud Hicks arrived, paid an admission fee of one cat, and entered the fair-grounds. The animal was deposited with the proper official, who began to complain of overwork. But the solution of "Fatty's" troubles was at hand.

There is a juvenile wireless that circulates good

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news against all the laws of nature. Ranny once walked down the street of Lakeville with a basket of candy, and before he had gone three blocks he enjoyed the companionship of every youth in the Center Ward who was not sick in bed. Let an automobile break down in the wilderness and presently there are four boys giving themselves up to pleasure. Plant two babies down an alley in a barn and you will have girls buzzing around the door. Thus came Gertie Riley and Josie Kendal.

"Five cents, please," said Ranny, who was now leading an idle life as collector of nickels.

The two girls gave out nothing but giggles.

"Exibitter?" Ranny tried again.

"Oh, isn't she sweet?" cried Josie. The two girls rushed in past the helpless doorman and snatched up examples of live stock from the environs of "Fatty" Hartman. Josie chose Exhibit A and Gertie Riley made, so Ranny felt, the best of a bad bargain and cuddled the mysterious stranger. They conversed with those infants in the disgusting language of their kind.

"They can be holders," said Ranny, who could think of no way to get the girls out short of physical force—and even that of doubtful issue.

"All right, let 'em stay," said his partner, magnanimously.

The same old wireless brought to the door of the

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exposition hall Mary Murray, who was admitted because of her young brother John. For John was nothing if not live stock. No longer a baby, he was still far below years of discretion; if he could not be held in the lap, neither could he be prevented from ruining the seating arrangements. Mary was told again and again to restrain her exhibit, but Mary, it seemed, had very little influence in that quarter. John was probably the poorest investment that the management had as yet made. Not even "Sausage" Buckley's dog, which presently arrived, fitted more poorly into any kind of system than did young John Murray.

When Clarence Raleigh came he did not bring that nickel which one might expect from a boy whose father was of a generous and easy nature, but came in holding to the ears of a rabbit, an animal in which "Sausage" Buckley's dog took an interest. Rather than have the two exhibits consolidated, Clarence held his live stock in his arms. He might better have paid his nickel and enjoyed a care-free afternoon, for he suffered mental agony to a value approaching a quarter.

At four o'clock, when Tom decided that it was time for official action, the census of Rucker's barn and annex was as follows:

Human: Management 2, other exhibitors 5, judge 1, holders 2.

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Live stock: Babies 2, dog 1, rabbit 1, cow 1, cat 1, miscellaneous (John Murray) 1.

General public paying admission in coin of realm and sitting quietly in seats: None.

Tom opened the proceedings with a few remarks.

“Ladies an’ gent’men. We have chose for judge of this here grand exhibition and caraval Mr. Judge Hartman, the fam-e-ous judge, so he will be the judge and do all the judgin’.” Here Tom’s speech suddenly lapsed from official to human. “Hey, Josie, le’s have a little piece off your hair-ribbon. Come on. We gotta have some blue ribbon.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t dare!” Josie replied, but her tone carried so little conviction that Tom went to the house and brought the scissors.

“Here, let me do it myself,” said Josie. She snipped off about three inches, John Murray for the moment well-behaved with fascination, and gave it to the rotund judge.

“This here baby is the finest live stock here,” said Ted, indicating his débutant brother sitting comfortably upon his holder—both babies had been polished for exhibition purposes. “If anybody says—”

“Hey, wait a minute! ’Ain’t you ever been to a fair?” demanded Tom. “Now we got to go ’round an’ look at ever’thing.”

Ranny deserted his unprofitable post at the door.

A BABY'S PLACE

"We gotta have order here," he said. "That there baby ain't either the fines'—fines'—"

There was a darkening of the doorway, a rush of air, a cry of joy and relief, and a family reunion taking place in poor Gertie Riley's lap. If there was another darkening of the door it was as quick as the shutter of a camera. The passing of Ted Blake out of the exhibition and carnival was practically instantaneous.

"Oh, the blessed darling dumpling! Oh, I was so scared!"

"Is it your baby, Mis' Hight?" asked Gertie. "Ted Blake said it was his brother."

"The idea!" The young mother squeezed the remaining breath out of her offspring. It seemed that a little colored girl was taking care of the baby and Ted Blake asked to borrow the baby for a minute. A pair of scared white eyes peeking into the doorway were silent witnesses to the truth of Mrs. Hight's explanation. "Who stole this one?" she concluded.

Ranny's sister was rationally explained, but Mrs. Hight was still suffering from outrage and shock. "I'll see that your mothers know about this," she said. "It might have been gipsies or anything."

"Fatty" Hartman here reached the intellectual high-water mark of his career.

"I'm the judge of this here fair, Mis' Hight," he said, "an' I got to give out the blue ribbon. I give

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out the blue ribbon"—rhetorical pause with prize suspended in air—"to that there baby. That is the fines' live stock here."

"The idea! I must say I never heard of such doings," said Mrs. Hight, taking the ribbon. It was clear that she was gratified at finding so much discernment in so spherical a person. The audience gasped, but there was no open criticism. Besides, while Mrs. Hight was pinning the order of merit upon her child something extraordinary was happening to "Fatty's" face. In fact, Judge Hartman was handing down a colossal wink.

There was commotion now because Bud Hicks had relaxed his watchfulness over his cat; some assorted growling and spitting, an arched back, and a rush up the beam to a rafter where Bud's cat, high above the grand exhibition and carnival, stood looking down with hate upon "Sausage" Buckley's dog. During this *divertissement* Mrs. Hight, prize-winning live stock, and colored attendant departed.

"Give us some more ribbon, Josie," said the judge. "That don't count."

Josie, seeing hope for her own charge, submitted to another operation, to John Murray's delight. This, in John's opinion, was the best thing in the show.

"Sausage" now spoke a word for dogs as compared with mere infants. They had more hair and

A BABY'S PLACE

more feet; they were "fightier," he said, and could chase things. He indicated Bud's exhibit aloft.

"Yeah," said Bud. "I s'pose they can climb better 'n a cat. Le's see it climb a little."

"C'm'on out, ever'body, an' see the finest and biggest live stock here." Tom suddenly decided to make a mystery of it. "This will be a great surprise an' ever'body will be suprised. Step this way, Josie, and get suprised."

"I'm *afraid* of cows," said Josie.

"Aw, listen to that, would you?" Tom appealed to the superior male. "Cows wouldn't hurt nobody. I'd jes' as leave bring a cow right here in this here barn."

The now childless Gertie elected to stay with Josie Kendal; Mary Murray had to go and get surprised on account of John, and the dog went because of the rabbit. To enjoy the sight of Nellie one had only to go down the alley a little way, crawl through a hole in a fence into a back yard, cross this, and climb a board-pile. There stood Nellie!

Tom tried to create the illusion that this was the first cow that had ever been captured alive.

"It's the biggest live stock in the whole fair," he added. "It's got horns. Babies 'ain't got horns—have they, Ranny? Answer me that."

Ranny, thus cornered, nervously admitted that babies did not have horns.

RANNY

"My uncle's got a better cow than that," said Bud. "It's much more whiter."

"I betcha he 'ain't. I betcha a million dollars."

Bud clouded up and rained a few blows upon Tom's chest and Tom replied cleverly by kicking Bud upon the shin. It is a painful fact that a grand exhibition and carnival had to sit down and wait while two boys had a fight over the whiteness of the cows of Tom's neighbor and Bud's uncle.

Now there came that curious moment, not uncommon, when each contestant suddenly became afraid of the other. In the resulting lull, the calm and judicial "Fatty" ruled that Bud's uncle's cow had no standing, that Tom's cow could not take a prize in the fair because it wasn't Tom's cow and wasn't in the fair, that he did not care much for cows, and that, anyhow, he could not remember what he did with the new blue ribbon. He went through his pockets upon another hopeless quest.

"Le's go back. Mebbe I dropped it somewheres."

"Well," said Ranny, "I guess Josie would give us another piece."

Back in the barn they met calamity. Josie was not there; neither was Gertie; neither—here Ranny's reason tottered upon its throne—was Exhibit A, the nucleus of the fair, his charge to keep, the object of his solemn pledge, that perennial nuisance and delight, his baby sister.

A BABY'S PLACE

"Wha—where'd they go?" he asked.

Tom did his poor best; he searched the barn, suspecting a practical joke; he asked his mother, but she had not seen the girls depart—had, in fact, not known that it was ladies' day in their barn.

"What 'd that woman say about gipsies?" asked Bud Hicks, with rare tact.

"Aw, keep still, can't you?" said Ranny, miserably. "They prob'ly took 'er home."

"Well, look at that, would you?" said "Fatty," indicating the miscellaneous John Murray upon the floor.

John had found the missing ribbon, also the fascinating scissors. He was awarding the premium to himself on the instalment plan. One small piece remained in his hand, and it was clear that John was about to clip this in two, parting with an unnecessary finger and thumb. What had become of the rest was obvious; for the colors of Josie's hair-ribbon had not stood the test. John's chin was blue, so, also, were his lips and, as far as human knowledge went, his alimentary canal. There was no appeal from John's decision. He was the liveliest of all possible live stock. As Ranny hurried away the last view he had of the fair was of Mary Murray running an unappreciated finger around in John's mouth and slapping from time to time that all too gaudy face.

Ranny hurried homeward, alternately fearing gip-

RANNY

sies, hating girls, fearing parents, and hating himself. When he reached home he found a situation that was exactly the opposite of that which he had hoped. Mother was at home and sister was not—Mother, in fact, was out in the front yard, indicating parental anxiety.

“Where is she?” she cried. “What has happened to her?”

“Who? Oh, the baby? W’y, Josie Kendal’s got ’er.”

“Where is she?”

“Who, Josie? W’y—she’s with Gertie Riley. You see, they was a fair and caraval over at Tom’s barn—” Ranny saw a look upon Mother’s face that was quite unlike anything he had ever seen there before. It told him that this was no time to talk of fairs and carnivals. “Wait a minute; I’ll get ’er!” he cried, and was off down the path. And though he ran short of breath and had a pain in his side and was hot all over, he did not stop (except to spit on a stone as a cure for side-ache) until he was at the door of Josie Kendal’s home. It was Mrs. Kendal herself who answered Ranny’s breathless query.

“Why, no, Ranny. Josie isn’t at home yet.” A look of fright came into her face. “What is the matter? Has anything happened to Josie?”

“Oh, nuthin’. I jes’ wondered,” said Ranny.

A BABY'S PLACE

Ignoring Mrs. Kendal's distracted calls, he now puffed and panted his way to the house of Gertie Riley. Gertie was not at home, either. Ranny stayed only long enough to give Mrs. Riley the impression that she would never see her darling any more and hurried away. He went just as fast as ever, in spite of the fact that he had no place to go; he could not think of any other households to devastate. He looked upon porches, into yards and alleys; he followed the cries of babies, only to find them alien and inferior infants. Finally, with night coming on, he dragged his reluctant feet homeward.

And what a home-coming it was! Father sat upon the front porch with the evening paper in his lap—no, it was not the evening paper. It was something dear and desirable, something that he wanted to wrap his arms around and hold for one million years.

"Well, I see she got back all—aw-w—" The thing started in a natural and conversational tone, but it ended in a wail. Perhaps it was just as well; for Father's mouth relaxed at this outburst of relief.

"Sit down, Randolph," he said. "Mother's telephoning. We'll go in soon."

Through the open door Ranny could hear snatches of conversation: "No, it wasn't Josie's fault. She said Tom Rucker threatened to bring in a cow and she was afraid. . . . They stopped to show her to some girl friend. . . . Yes, I suppose they stayed

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longer than they intended. . . . Well, it's all right now, Mrs. Kendal. . . . No, don't feel that way. It was Ranny's fault entirely."

There was a tinkle and then another talk in which Mrs. Riley was assured that it was not Gertie's fault, but Ranny's entirely, that possibly the girls stayed a little longer than they intended. This conversation seemed to take a zoological turn. "They are queer creatures," said Mother. "One never knows what they will do next."

The scene there in the Dukes sitting-room in the September dusk was less violent than Ranny might have imagined, but even more distressing. It was made clear that Ranny had broken all the rules of human conduct. A sister was the most beautiful thing in nature and he had let his lie around like an old hat. It was to be understood now and forever that a baby's place was in the home. When they had finished picking his character to pieces they decreed in the time-honored way that what he needed now was not food, but sleep—although the contrary was true.

Before the sentence could be put into effect the telephone rang again.

"I think it's Mrs. Kendal's turn," said Father.

But in a moment it was obvious that this was neither of these distracted parents. Mother was saying:

A BABY'S PLACE

"Oh, how do you do? . . . Why, pretty well. . . . That's awfully nice of you. Of course *we* think she's lovely. How's *your* baby, Mrs. Hight?"

At the mention of the name Ranny froze fast to his chair. All he could hear was a series of noises sounding, even in this hour of trial, like the quacking of a duck and an occasional "yes" from Mother. No doubt the whole affair was coming out now. Presently he would be blamed for the kidnapping activities of Ted Blake. At last Mother got a chance to put in a word. "Well, I don't know, Mrs. Hight. It sounds like a good idea. I'll talk it over with Mr. Dukes and let you know. Yes. . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . Yes, hasn't it been beautiful? . . . Good-by."

"That Mrs. Hight," said Mother—"I think her husband is a traveling-man, isn't he? Well, she's planning to get up a baby-show. Wants to know whether we will come in." Mother added, with an apologetic laugh, "I suppose she thinks her baby will get the prize."

Father gave his burden an extra squeeze. "There won't be anything there that is finer than this," he said. A ray of amusement crossed his face; Mother caught it, too; they smiled together. "I suppose we might let this fellow have his supper," said Father.

"Yes, if you think best," Mother answered.

RANNY

After supper, when the dishes and the baby had been washed and put away and Ranny's reprieve was over and Father and Mother had come in for a last good night, Ranny put the seal of his approval upon the institution of the home and came perilously near an outburst of sentiment.

"Well, I'm glad we're all here, all right," said Randolph Harrington Dukes.

THE END

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